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UNDER A CLOUD; OR, A DAUGHTER'S SUSPICION.

BY SARA CLAXTON,

AUTHOR OF "WHICH WAS THE WOMAN?" "FOR HER DEAR SAKE," "LEAP YEAR," ETC., ETC.



"I TOOK HER IN MY ARMS AND SHE WEPT BITTERLY."

Under a Cloud ;

OR,
A DAUGHTER'S SUSPICION.

BY SARA CLAXTON,
AUTHOR OF "A WOMAN'S WITCHERY," "A
FATEFUL GAME," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

LOVE'S YOUNG DREAM.

"I'm only going out for half an hour, Sarah. Your master is asleep. If he should call, go to him at once," I said to my uncle's servant, as I hastily slipped on my hat and cloak and sallied forth, for the first time for several days, to get a breath of fresh air.

"A walk will do you good, miss, I'm sure," replied the old servant, as I hurried away. "Don't be worrying about the master; I'll see to him, if he wants anything. He'll have to learn to put up with my nursing now."

I had been with my uncle—an old bachelor in failing health—for nearly a month, the period allowed for my yearly holiday from the hospital where I was matron.

I had come to him instead of going to my home at Bridgeport; first, because he was ill and fancied my nursing better than any one else's; second, because my stepmother had taken it into her head to arrange her yearly trip with my two sisters just at the very time I was forced by circumstances to take my vacation, and neither my time, my purse, nor my inclination would permit me to join her in Saratoga, whither she had betaken herself.

I was grieved to lose my yearly opportunity of seeing the girls, but beyond that I did not care; and my uncle's offer of a home during my holidays was most welcome.

But it had not been much of a holiday to me after all; for the poor old man had been taken suddenly ill, and for the last fortnight I had had to watch him almost perpetually.

My leave of absence from the hospital was now over, and on the morrow I should have to return to town.

I hurried along the streets—Atlanticville, where my uncle lived, was a large watering-place—through the town and out on to the beach, and was soon seated half-buried in the dry sea sand watching the gorgeous sunset and the reflection of the crimson and golden clouds in the motionless sea before me.

How calm and fair it looked, as if it never could be ruffled; and how securely the white-winged vessels sailed along on its bosom in the far distance.

It was a lovely scene, and I looked at it with longing, regretful eyes.

"To-morrow, and I shall be in the tiresome city again," I thought, with a sigh; "and it will be a whole year before I get away again, unless it be for a day or two at Christmas."

I sunk back on the sand as these thoughts passed through my mind, and began thinking of the journey before me on the morrow, and the state of my uncle's health, when voices close at hand fell on my ear, and I peeped out from under my umbrella to see who the newcomers could be.

"What a lovely girl," I thought, "and what a handsome fellow! One of the officers from the man-of-war anchored in the bay, I suppose. Who can she be?"

All oblivious of my presence, they walked slowly along, talking eagerly—or rather, I should say, the young officer talked eagerly to his companion, who listened with downcast eyes—her long, dark eyelashes almost resting on her cheeks, and a blush mantling her fair face.

"I have been too hasty, perhaps," I heard him say. "I did not mean to speak yet, but you have heard, have you not, that I am promoted and must leave?"

"Leave?" she cried, with a start.

"Yes; to-morrow," he replied.

"To-morrow!—so soon?" she said, and then blushed deeply.

"To-morrow; and—and I may be away a long, long time. I have been assigned to the Iceland, you know, and—"

"What! the ship that is going on the Arctic expedition?" she cried in consternation, stopping short in her walk. "Oh, Mr. Sinclair! *must* you go?"

"I cannot refuse," he replied firmly. "But tell me"—and his voice grew very soft—"are you sorry? Do you care whether I go or stay, Miss Lonsdale?"

I began to feel uncomfortable. I felt as if I were eavesdropping, but hardly liked to make my presence known after having heard so much. I hesitated, and remained still, and apparently asleep.

"Of course, I—I wish you weren't going, Mr. Sinclair. Oh, we have had such a pleasant time of it at Atlanticville this year, and now our party will be spoiled! Why could they not have waited?"

"Then you *are* sorry? you will miss me a little?" he said eagerly.

"Yes; certainly I shall miss you," she replied frankly, looking up into his face with the loveliest, softest of dark-brown eyes. "I am very sorry you are going."

And her voice was full of regret.

"Then if you will miss me—if you are sorry, you give me hope," he replied, seizing her hand. "Oh, Lisa! I love you so madly! Do not send me away without telling me that I need not despair!"

I felt my ears tingling. I would have given anything to get away, but I dared not move.

There was nothing for it but to remain quiet.

Her reply came slowly, and in a faltering voice.

"I hardly know. Only six weeks ago, Mr. Sinclair, we were almost strangers. It seems so singular—so sudden. You must give me time to consider before I answer," she said.

"But remember that to-morrow I sail."

"Ah, yes! Well, till to-morrow then," she said.

"But I may speak to your father to-night—may I not?"

"Why not wait till to-morrow?" she replied doubtfully.

"Because I may have to start early. And remember, Lisa, (I feel as if, after all, it were a shame to bind you for so long), I may be away three years."

"Three years!" she said, in a voice of consternation. "Shall I not see you again for three years?"

"Lisa, Lisa!" he cried joyfully—"my darling, you *do* love me!—the tone of your voice tells me so."

"Wait, wait! I cannot decide till you have seen papa—to-morrow!" she said shyly, but not taking her hand from his clasp. "Let us go home, Mr. Sinclair; it is getting late."

He murmured a few words, stooped suddenly and kissed her brow and lips, then they walked silently on.

I peeped out from my hiding-place; and when I saw they were well away I got up, and walked as quickly as possible toward home.

What would Sarah say to my half-hour?

It had already grown to an hour and a half; it was nearly seven o'clock.

I found Sarah in tears and the house in confusion. My uncle had been taken worse; the doctor had been summoned; danger was apprehended; and though before nine o'clock all the worst symptoms were allayed, my uncle determined to do what he had for one reason or another put off from day to day—make his will.

The lawyer and a friend, a certain Colonel Lonsdale, were accordingly sent for.

"Lonsdale!" I mused, as I wrote the note.

"Surely he called her Miss Lonsdale" (thinking of the love-scene I had witnessed on the beach).

"Can Colonel Lonsdale be the father of the lovely girl I saw this evening?"

An hour later the lawyer arrived; and soon

after I saw a tall, handsome, military man walk up to the house.

As he entered, the lawyer, Mr. Brand, begged me to send him up-stairs at once.

Colonel Lonsdale needed no second bidding; he ran up-stairs, to my uncle's bedroom, and with the doctor and Mr. Brand remained there for more than an hour, while I and Sarah sat in the dressing-room waiting lest we should be wanted.

At last the door opened, and the doctor beckoned to me to enter.

I did so softly, and saw my uncle pale and haggard, reclining against his pillows in a dozing condition, while Mr. Brand was collecting and sealing up certain papers and documents that lay on the table.

"He will do now," whispered the doctor. "It has been an exertion to him, dictating and signing his will; but it is well it is over. His life, as he and all of us know, is a very uncertain one. Not that I apprehend any immediate change, you know."

"Then I can leave him to-morrow to Sarah's nursing, you think?" I replied. "If not, I will write for further leave of absence."

"Oh, you can leave him to Sarah and me with safety," he rejoined. "Colonel Lonsdale has kindly promised to look in now and then, and, being an old friend, he will cheer him up a bit. How late it is! I must be going—half-past twelve, I declare!"

"Take some supper before you go; it is all prepared," I said.

"Thank you, no; I must be off," he replied.

And he left us; but Colonel Lonsdale staid for an hour or more, and the clock struck two as I let him out at the front door.

He looked worried and depressed, I thought, and I wondered what private troubles he might have; for although my uncle was an old friend, I did not imagine his dejection could proceed entirely from grief at his illness.

"It will be almost light when I get home," he observed, looking toward the east. "How deliciously cool the air is!"

"Have you far to go, then?" I asked.

"Yes; don't you know? We live at South-bank—quite on the other side of the town. Our house is on the edge of the cliff there."

"Oh, I didn't know," I replied. "My uncle has been so poorly ever since I came here that I have seen none of his friends."

"Yes, you must have had a dull time of it. But your uncle has been fortunate in having such an excellent nurse. At what hour do you leave to-morrow—or to-day, I should say?"

"At four o'clock," I replied.

"Then I shall do myself the pleasure of seeing you off," he rejoined, "if you will allow me."

I bowed in reply; he raised his hat, and walked briskly away in the direction of his home.

"What a handsome man!" I thought. "I never saw a face that pleased me more. And what a pleasant voice! I wonder how uncle came to know him so well; he has never mentioned him to me. He must be the father of that pretty girl. There is something in his face that reminds me of her. I almost wish I were going to stay here a little longer, so that I might make their acquaintance."

Then I closed the door and went up again to my uncle's room, and soon fell asleep in the arm-chair near his bedside.

When I woke up it was broad daylight.

My uncle was still sleeping peacefully, so I stole away on tiptoe to arrange my hair and dress, and finish my packing.

At ten o'clock we breakfasted, my uncle declaring himself much better, and even wishing he had not made his will with such precipitation.

"However, it had to be done, and is done," he ended by saying, heaving a deep sigh, as if the doing of it had involved some enormous sacrifice. "So you are leaving me to-day, Ernestina?"

"Yes; I am not my own mistress, you know. I am under orders."

"True; and orders must be obeyed. You've had an unpleasant holiday, with a cross old bachelor full of whims and fancies, my dear; but you'll find I've not forgotten you in that precious document I signed last night,"—his voice growing pathetic.

"Indeed, uncle, it has been a pleasure to me to be of any service to you," I replied. "You know, nursing is my vocation."

"I know you have given up everything to go in for it, my dear; but to my mind girls ought to marry—*ought to marry*—get husbands to work for them, my dear, instead of taking up new-fangled notions about being independent and working for themselves."

"But suppose the husband can't be found, uncle?" I said, with a laugh.

"Pshaw! My dear, do you pretend to tell me pretty young women like you and Emma and Eleanor can't find husbands? The world must be strangely changed since I was young if such is the case, that's all I can say!"

"There's hope for Emma and Eleanor, uncle," I rejoined, laughing; "they are young—quite girls. But time flies. How old do you think I am, uncle?"

My uncle looked at me in surprise.

"I remember your birth very well, my dear; when your father and mother were living at The Grove. Let me see, in— Why, by Jove, Ernestina! you don't mean to say you are thirty-two years old?"

And my uncle looked quite aghast.

"Thirty-two years and four months, uncle. Quite an old maid, you see!" I replied, laughing at his dismay.

"Well, time *does* fly! But you don't look it, my dear—not a day over eight-and-twenty, I vow; and you always were a fine-looking girl. You've time before you yet, my dear," he returned, consolingly.

"Not long, I fear; and, talking of time, it's twelve o'clock. I wonder the doctor is not here," I replied.

"Oh, I feel all right to-day! Don't want him. I expect Brand at two, and Colonel Lonsdale will come in this evening. I'll take my medicine now, Ernestina," he said. "Are your trunks all packed, my dear?"

"Yes," I answered; "I've only one."

"Travel light? That's right, my dear; ladies generally cumber themselves with packages and parcels by the dozen."

"No fear of that with me," I answered; and stood looking with rather wistful eyes at the sea, thinking how in a few hours I should again be in my quiet rooms in the hospital, with no view from my windows but the dingy street.

The morning passed, but neither the doctor nor Mr. Brand appeared.

At half-past three I started for the station without their making their appearance.

Arrived there, I remembered Colonel Lonsdale's promise, and looked around in search of him; but he was nowhere to be seen.

To the last I momentarily expected him; yet he came not. Then the bell rung; the conductor signaled; the train started.

We were off, and Atlanticville was soon out of sight.

CHAPTER II.

A SUDDEN CHANGE.

"ERNESTINA, Ernestina! some one has taken Penton!" cried my younger sister, Emma, rushing into the drawing-room at Sunnyside (our home) one spring morning.

This was nearly a year later than the events recorded in the previous chapter, and six months after the death of our step-mother, which event had obliged me to give up my hospital life, and return to Bridgeport, to keep house for my two sisters.

"Indeed!" I replied. "That is a piece of news. Who are the happy people? I always think Penton one of the loveliest places in the country."

"Ah! you would indeed have said that if

you had been with me this morning, Tina. The ground in the grove was pink with anemones, and the turf on the lawn under the chestnut trees, blue with violets. Look!"

And she held up a huge bundle of floral treasures.

"Yes, and the house was all open," said Eleanor; "we went in, Tina. They have re-furnished it almost entirely. The drawing-room is lovely."

"But who are the people? I hope a nice family."

"Oh, a Colonel Somebody, with an only daughter, an invalid. What was the name, Emma?"

"Longford or Langdale—some such name. No, Lonsdale; that was it! And much I envy them!" returned Emma. "The chestnuts are just breaking into flowers, Tina, and—"

"Lonsdale!" I repeated, thoughtfully, without replying to Emma's words,—"Lonsdale! How strange if it should be—"

"What do you mean? If it should be what?" the two girls both exclaimed.

"If it should be Colonel Lonsdale, poor uncle's friend, whom I met at Atlanticville just a few weeks before he died," I answered; for our uncle had died very suddenly, not two months after I had left him the year before.

"Most likely, unless he were a very rich man," replied Emma, doubtfully.

"He may be a rich man for all I know. He had a daughter—I saw her once—a beautiful girl. At least," I added, correcting myself, "I believe the Miss Lonsdale I saw was his daughter."

"And was she an invalid?" asked Eleanor.

"No-o," I replied, doubtfully; "I shouldn't say so. At least, when I saw her she seemed well enough. Uncle, however, did mention in a mysterious way in one of his letters some 'very disagreeable event,' that had happened at his friend's house soon after I had left. I wonder—but we shall soon know. When are they coming down?"

"In a fortnight, Allen said. And then good-bye to our rambles in the grounds," said Emma, ruefully.

"Come, let's put our flowers into water now!" Eleanor said. "We must make the most of them, you know; and I do think, Tina, that when this little drawing-room has plenty of flowers in it, it is the snuggest, prettiest little room in the place. You have done wonders for Sunnyside since you came home."

"Yes; it is a pretty little place," I said stifling a sigh; for pretty as it was, and much as I loved my two sisters, it had been a terrible trial to me to give up the path in life I had chosen, and say good-bye to my patients and the career I had entered into in the hospital.

"I believe, Tina, you would prefer being in New York to being here!" said Emma, turning up her pretty little nose at the idea. "How you could endure that hospital I cannot imagine!"

"You forget how interesting my work there was," I replied, as I smoothed the bright golden hair back from her fair forehead, and looked into her laughing blue eyes; "but I assure you, Emma, I prefer the country to New York."

"Tina would prefer whatever place her duty lay in to any other!" said Eleanor, a tall, elegant-looking brunette, the elder of my two sisters, laying her hand on my shoulder. "She likes Sunnyside, and is quite happy here; but she gave up her work in New York because she thought it her duty to do so when mamma died."

"Anyway, I am quite happy; and what can I desire more?" I replied. "I do wonder if the Lonsdales who have taken Penton are the Lonsdales I mean? He is a very handsome man, and—"

"A handsome man! But he has a grown-up daughter; he must be quite old!" said Emma, who had just passed her eighteenth birthday.

"Well, not young, of course; but still under fifty, I suppose," I answered.

To me that age did not seem so great as it did to my sister.

"And there is no Mrs. Lonsdale?" asked Eleanor.

"I never heard—my uncle never mentioned her; but of course there may be," I replied.

"In that case it can't be the Atlanticville Lonsdales who have taken Penton. Allen said he was a widower," she answered.

"Well, we shall soon know, I suppose. What are you girls going to do this afternoon?"

"Mr. Dacre asked us to come down and see the church decorations," said Eleanor; "they are nearly finished now. We can go, I suppose, Tina?"

A slight blush rose to her cheek as she spoke. Our handsome young rector had been a very constant visitor at Sunnyside of late.

"Of course you can go," I rejoined. "I will meet you on your way home, and Mr. Dacre might come in and take tea with us. I've several things to do, or I would come with you."

My "several things" consisted in the mending of a large basketful of house linen, and as soon as the girls had started for the village I sat down in the bow-window and began my task.

My thoughts soon wandered back to our morning's conversation, and I began to wonder if Miss Lonsdale, the pretty girl I had seen on the beach at Atlanticville, was really to be our neighbor, and if she were engaged to the handsome officer, Mr. Sinclair (yes, that was his name—I had not forgotten it), whom I had seen with her.

Furthermore, I wondered what was the unfortunate event that had happened in their house, and whether or not the poor girl were really an invalid.

I found the girls and Mr. Dacre brimful of news concerning the expected strangers. The arrival of a new family in a quiet country neighborhood is a great event, and we all looked forward anxiously to it.

"If they are nice," said Emma, "it will make all the difference to Bridgeport. I dare say they will give lots of parties—a ball, perhaps, and they have had made a lovely tennis lawn behind the house."

"That does not look as if the young lady were an invalid," said Mr. Dacre. "I hope, at any rate, that she will be strong enough to help us in the parish, Miss Eleanor, and that they will turn out good church people."

"Oh, I hope so," replied Eleanor, whose pale cheek I saw flush with pleasure at the rector having identified her with himself in the parish work.

It seemed as if they certainly were church people, for the Sunday after their arrival, and just as Eleanor began to play the voluntary (she always played the organ in church) a carriage drew up, and Colonel Lonsdale, his daughter, and a middle-aged woman (his daughter's companion as we surmised) walked up the aisle and seated themselves in the Penton pew.

"Is he your Colonel Lonsdale?" whispered Emma.

I nodded.

"And the girl?"

I had to look at her twice before I answered.

"I think so," I replied, doubtfully.

And then the service began.

I fear I did not pay half the attention to it which I ought, or to Mr. Dacre's eloquent sermon.

I was so struck with the extraordinary change in Colonel and Miss Lonsdale, that I could think of little else.

The colonel had aged by ten years since I saw him at Atlanticville. Handsome and striking he still was, but every line on his face had deepened, his hair had begun to grizzle, and the vague look of uneasiness I had noted on his face had changed to an expression of the deepest melancholy.

As for the girl, whom I had thought so lovely scarcely a year before, the change in her was still more remarkable.

She was pale, thin, and worn; the light had died out of her beautiful eyes; no smile parted her pale lips.

She scarcely raised her eyes from her book during the service, and the expression of her face was one of the profoundest melancholy, mingled, as I fancied, with a touch of horror and fear.

What had happened to change them so strangely?

I looked at the lady who accompanied them—a commonplace middle-aged woman, with a good-natured face, though rather sharp gray eyes and firmly-set mouth, dressed in deep mourning.

I had fancied for a moment she might be the colonel's second wife, and the cause of the change I saw in him; but second thoughts induced me to dismiss such an idea from my mind altogether.

Could Mr. Sinclair have died?

Was it grief at his death that had altered Miss Lonsdale so completely?

This seemed probable, but in a few moments I remembered that not a week before I had seen his name in the papers in connection with the exploring expedition in the Arctic regions, and knew therefore that his death could not be the cause of her trouble.

I was thrown back on the "unfortunate events" (whatever they were) mentioned by my uncle.

"My dear Tina," said Emma, as we came out of church, "I am dreadfully disappointed in Miss Lonsdale. Do you call her lovely?"

"She is much changed," I replied, "but still hers is a lovely face, Emma; every feature is perfect."

"But how pale, how inanimate, how miserably ill and unhappy she looks!" continued Emma. "The colonel is a fine, soldierly-looking man, but as grim as can be. I didn't expect them to be a bit like what they are, Tina, and I confess I feel disappointed."

As she spoke the Penton folk drove by.

Miss Lonsdale was lying back in the carriage, wrapped in a shawl, almost as if it were winter. Beside her sat the strange lady, and Colonel Lonsdale sat opposite, with his back to the horses.

They were all silent as they drove by, and I noticed that Miss Lonsdale's eyes were fixed blankly on the cushions of the seat before her.

The colonel raised his eyes as he passed us, and they fell on me.

A look of recognition came into his face.

I bowed, and as he took off his hat a smile broke over his countenance that made him almost his old self.

"He remembers you, then, Tina," said Eleanor, in surprise. "How often did you see him?"

"Only once," I replied; "on the night poor uncle was taken ill and made his will—the 20th of July last, you know."

"He will call, then?"

"I suppose so, as we are all ladies, and we have met before," I answered.

"How delightful! But I do wonder what is the matter with that poor girl! Her eyes quite haunt me. Perhaps we may be able to cheer her up a little," said Emma, gazing after the carriage as it disappeared in the distance.

"She must have been very ill since I saw her," I said. "She then had the loveliest color and the brightest expression. The colonel seems changed too. I wonder who the strange lady is?"

My curiosity was satisfied on that point a week later, when Colonel Lonsdale called.

He apologized for the non-appearance of his daughter and Mrs. Parsons, her companion.

Miss Lonsdale was worse than usual that day, and Mrs. Parsons did not like to leave her.

He sighed deeply as he spoke, and looked so troubled that from my heart I pitied him.

"You consider the climate here healthy and bracing, Miss Trafford?" he asked. "I am terribly anxious about my daughter's health. She dislikes the sea, or I should have taken a place near it; the sea air would have been so good for her."

"Oh, we consider the air of the Berkshire

Hills wonderfully invigorating," I replied. "You could not have chosen a healthier spot, Colonel Lonsdale. I was sorry to see Miss Lonsdale looking so ill and altered last Sunday."

"What! you have seen my daughter before? I was not aware of it," he replied with interest.

"I saw her once at Atlanticville. I don't think she saw me," I replied.

And I felt I was blushing as I recalled all the circumstances of our meeting.

He sighed again.

"She is very much altered, and her state causes me great anxiety. It will be very good of you and your sisters if you will come over and see her sometimes, Miss Trafford. The doctors advise cheerful society; but Lisa seems to dread the sight of strangers, and even of acquaintances, and would shut herself up from every one—even from me—if she could."

The tone in which he said the last words was most touchingly sad.

"We shall only be too glad to do our best," I replied. "Is Miss Lonsdale fond of country excursions? Does she ride or draw?"

"She used to be fond of all these things," he answered, sadly; "but of late she has given them up. I don't think that since her illness—a sort of nervous or brain fever—I have ever seen her take up a pencil. And she seems averse from any exertion."

"Emma and Eleanor must take her in hand," I replied, with a smile, and trying to speak cheerfully. "I am sorry they are both out to day; but we will come over and see Miss Lonsdale in a few days."

"It would be very kind of you," he said, eagerly; "and I should like you to see my child, and hear what is your impression of her state. You are accustomed to invalids, Miss Trafford, and might see something in her condition that escapes our eyes. I shall anxiously look forward to your visit?"

After a little further conversation he rose to go; and, I was glad to notice, looked more cheerful than when he came.

He hoped great things, I saw, for his child from the companionship of Emma and Eleanor.

"So your handsome colonel has been here, Tina," said Emma, half an hour later, "and we have missed him."

"He wants us all to come over to Penton and make his daughter's acquaintance. So you need not be too much disappointed," I replied, lightly.

"Oh, I dare say we shall see plenty of him by-and-by," she retorted. "As for me, I confess I am quite curious to make the acquaintance of the whole family. By the way, now I remember uncle mentioning some very painful occurrence which took place in their house just after you left him last year. What was it, Tina?"

"I don't know; I never heard. It might be best not to allude to it in any way when we go over to Penton."

"Allude to it, my dear Tina! Of course not," replied my sister, laughing. "I should be afraid to do so, for your grim colonel might treat me like a naughty, curious child, and box my ears!"

CHAPTER III.

A STRANGE STORY.

ONE fine sunny afternoon, a week later, we set off to pay our visit to Penton.

We all enjoyed our drive, I think, and were in the best of spirits when we stopped at the door of the house.

It was three years since I had visited it, when its late owner, an old maiden lady, was inhabiting it; and I was hardly prepared for the alterations I saw on every side.

The gloomy old Hall, with its stiff, ugly chairs and hard marble floor, was now transformed into a luxurious apartment; flowers bloomed in profusion in every corner; soft carpets covered the floor; china and pictures adorned the walls, and tastefully arranged furniture gave the place quite a romantic appearance.

The drawing-room into which we were shown was equally changed, and furnished with the utmost taste and splendor; but I could not notice the elegance of everything around, for my eyes were fixed on the face of the young lady seated on the sofa.

The colonel hastened to introduce me to his daughter.

He had taken her hand while he did so; but she, with a look of horror that astonished and perplexed me, withdrew it hastily as he said:

"My daughter—Miss Trafford. Lisa, I hope you and these young ladies will soon be friends."

She smiled rather coldly and shook hands with us all; and as we went through the same ceremony with Mrs. Parsons—who at that moment bustled in—I felt the colonel's daughter was watching us with searching eyes.

In another moment she had seated herself beside me, and we were soon in deep conversation, while Mrs. Parsons did her best to entertain Emma, Eleanor being taken possession of by Mr. Dacre, who had just come in, and the Colonel looked on well pleased.

An instant later, Miss Lonsdale caught his eye fixed on her, and became suddenly silent; and not until, with a gloomy countenance, he had left the room did she address another word to me.

"How do you like Penton?" had been naturally my first question. "Is it not a pretty place?"

"Very pretty. I like the hills!" she replied, a dreamy look coming into her large, dark eyes.

I could not but think of the difference between this scenery and that of the beach where I had first seen her with her lover.

Did she still remember him? I wondered.

"The air here is very healthy. I hope you will soon get stronger."

She sighed.

"I hope so; but I don't think the air will make much difference to me."

"Oh, but, excuse me, I am half a doctor and something of a nurse, you know. For invalids there is nothing like good air, and you have been very ill."

"Who told you so?" she said, quickly and suspiciously.

"Your father," I answered, surprised at her manner.

"And what did he tell you about my illness?" she continued.

"Nothing; only that you had been ill."

She seemed relieved, and turned the conversation into another channel, till Colonel Lonsdale reappeared, and she again became silent.

I did not speak much more to her that day.

Colonel Lonsdale seated himself beside me, and Mrs. Parsons joined in our talk till it was time to go.

As I shook hands with the colonel's daughter she said hurriedly:

"You will come and see me again soon, will you not?"

"Certainly; whenever you like."

For the first time, her face lit up with something like a smile of gratification, and I saw the colonel's countenance beam with satisfaction.

What a kind, handsome face he had! How was it his only child seemed to dread him?

"I have not seen her look like that since—since her illness," he whispered, as he gave me his arm and led me to the carriage. "You have done her good already, Miss Trafford."

"Cheerful society and our healthy country air will work wonders for her you will see," I replied, hopefully.

"But you will come again soon, will you not?"

"Of course; with pleasure. I foresee your daughter and I will become great friends."

"What nice people!" cried Emma, as soon as we were out of hearing. "Your colonel is charming, Tina—not a bit grim, after all; and Mrs. Parsons is an old dear! How did you get on with her, Eleanor?"

"I don't know; I hardly spoke to her. She looks nice, and Mr. Dacre says—"

"Ah!" interrupted Emma, mischievously. "I think Mr. Dacre talked more to you and you to him than to the Lonsdales. However, Tina and I did our duty. Perhaps you can tell me, Tina, what you think of Mrs. Parsons."

"I liked her," I replied; "but I talked mostly to Colonel Lonsdale and his daughter. Poor girl, her illness must have been a serious one!"

"She has a beautiful face, as you said, Tina," put in Eleanor; "but what an odd expression it sometimes wears! She almost frightened me once! Such a fearful, terrified look came into it! It was when you spoke of her illness."

"She is very nervous, I can see that," I answered, thoughtfully; "but I dare say she will soon get better. How beautifully they have furnished the house!"

"And did you ever see such flowers? Miss Lonsdale ought to be a happy girl. What a pity it is she should be so delicate!"

"Ah, you see there is some drawback in every one's lot!" I replied. "Perhaps we though so much poorer, are far happier than she is. I, who have seen so much of illness, consider good health the greatest earthly blessing!"

"Just what Mr. Dacre says," repeated Eleanor. "You know how good he is to the poor people in the village, Tina."

"Yes; they are lucky to have such a friend," I replied.

"I wonder," interrupted Emma, slyly, "if he will take a fancy to Miss Lonsdale?"

A look of dismay came into Eleanor's face.

"Do you think it likely?" she faltered, looking at me imploringly.

"Hardly," I replied, laughing. "At any rate, we need not begin to imagine such a thing, Nelly."

"Of course I was only joking," said Emma, contritely; "he hardly spoke to or looked at her. He 'has other fish to fry,' as they say. Now, Eleanor, don't upset us. We were nearly in the ditch that time. I really think I'd better drive in at the gate, or you'll come to grief."

"Nonsense! I upset you, indeed! Why, Mr. Dacre says—"

"That you drive splendidly! I can quite believe it, my dear. He has a strange way of admiring everything you do," replied Emma. "There! the danger is over, and here we are once more safe at home."

It was long before I paid another visit to Penton, and then Lisa Lonsdale drove over and spent the afternoon with us; and every time I saw her I grew to like her better, and was glad to think that the feeling was reciprocated; but as time passed I found it difficult to get beyond a certain point with her, and I came to the conclusion that she was not only nervous and feeble, but that she had some terrible secret weighing on her spirit that she dared not divulge to any one.

One day by chance I let slip the name of Atlanticville, and the fact that I knew the place, and in a minute the smile that had brightened her face fled, her color faded, and she looked at me with the expression of suspicion and doubt I had seen in her face when I visited her first at Penton.

"Do you know Atlanticville well?" she asked.

"I was there only once," I replied, "nursing an uncle who died soon afterward. I was seldom out of the house, so I can't say I know the place well."

"We lived there once. I don't care for the place," she said, after a pause. "Don't let us talk about it; it was there I was so ill, you know."

But in spite of her request, she spoke several times of it, and I saw that she could not stifle the remembrance.

For the rest of that day she was sadder and more dreamy than I had known her for some time.

I sat long after she had left, thinking of

what had passed, and made up my mind to ask Colonel Lonsdale for a full account of her illness.

He had always shrunk from speaking of it, but I felt that if I were to give him my opinion on her case, as he had often begged me, it was necessary that I should know what had taken place and how her illness had come about.

"Has she never said anything to you about it herself?" he said, his face falling, and a sad, wistful expression coming over it.

"No, never," I replied.

"Ah!" and he sighed deeply; "that is just what troubles me, Miss Trafford. I feel I am in ignorance as to what really caused her sudden attack. I cannot believe that I am acquainted with all the circumstances that happened on that dreadful night. Doubtless you have heard of the murder—for a murder it certainly was—that was committed at our very door at Atlanticville?"

I shook my head.

"I did hear in a casual way of some very unpleasant circumstances that had happened before you left Atlanticville, but what they were I never learned. If you do not object to speaking of them, perhaps you will tell me what they were. It is not, I assure you, from any curiosity that I inquire."

"As if I should for an instant imagine such a thing!" he replied, reproachfully. "I ought to have told you before, but I imagined you knew, if not everything, at any rate the outline of what happened on that dreadful night."

Again I made a motion of dissent.

"Well, then, I returned home late—past two it was—and was just proceeding to my room, when the gleam of a light burning in a distant apartment caught my eye.

"It was in a small sitting-room, leading out to a piece of garden just on the edge of the cliff, and along the front of which ran a veranda, a favorite resort of my daughter.

"Very imprudent of Lisa," I thought, 'if she has left it burning, or perhaps is still there. The child should know better than to wait up for me when she knows I have gone out on business.'

"And I hastened toward the room.

"It was empty!

"Lisa!" I cried, but there was no answer; and taking up the candle with a strange foreboding of evil, I looked around, then walked out into the veranda.

"She was not there; but on the grass just beyond I saw her lying, the moonlight gleaming on her white robe and white face, from which all signs of life were absent.

"With a cry, I rushed to her, raised her in my arms, and alarmed the household.

"The doctor was summoned, and ere long my poor Lisa was restored to consciousness, but her mind was gone.

"She raved incoherently, and it was plain to us all that brain-fever would be the result.

"You may imagine the state of anxiety I was in that night.

"What could have caused this sudden seizure?

"The doctor declared some terrible shock or fright must have caused it.

"What frightened her? or what had she seen from the veranda, or the garden that had so terrified her?

"The morning brought an answer to our questions.

"I was sitting about nine o'clock by her bedside, half stunned by grief, when I was told my presence was at once required below.

"Reluctantly enough I left her, and was met in the hall by a detective.

"A murder was committed on your premises last night, sir," he said, respectfully enough.

"A murder!" I repeated in horror. "Who is murdered?—which of my servants?"

"None, sir; the body found is that of a strange woman, but it is certain she was murdered in your garden last night, and thrown over the cliff. The marks of the struggle may be seen plain enough, and a fragment or two

of her dress still hangs on the bushes that grow down the face of the cliff."

"Here was an ample explanation of Lisa's illness. Without doubt she had witnessed the whole struggle, and the horror, the terror of the scene had injured her brain.

"Have you no clew to the murderer?" I asked.

"At present, none whatever," the detective answered; "but, doubtless, in time we shall obtain some. At present all that is certain is that it must have taken place after the turn of the tide, otherwise the body would have fallen into the water, and been carried out to sea. Will you come outside, sir, and take a look at the corpse?"

"I shuddered at the matter-of-fact way in which he spoke; but I could not refuse, and followed him to where the murdered woman lay.

"Do you recognize her?" he asked.

"No; a perfect stranger."

"Married," he observed, pointing to the wedding ring on her finger. "Young, too, and pretty, or must have been so once. You'll excuse me if I make a few inquiries up at your house, sir?"

"Oh, of course!" I replied, feeling an uneasy sensation, nevertheless; for I felt sure enough that my poor child's evidence, should she ever be able to give it, would be required at the inquest on the remains of the murdered woman."

The colonel paused in his narrative, and I saw the sad look deepen in his eyes and the lines about his mouth grow sterner.

"It was weeks before my poor child recovered her senses.

"She lay on her fevered couch, raving incoherently, and for some time we feared the worst.

"It seemed as if her strength must succumb to the fever, and that she would die without telling us what she had witnessed.

"Ole curious, and to me, as you may imagine, most painful peculiarity in her delirium was her strong aversion to my presence.

"The sound of my footstep was sometimes enough to bring on a paroxysm of frenzy, and she would utter shriek after shriek if I came within her sight when the delirium was on her; so it came to pass that I was forced to give the care of her to others and seldom to enter her room, but to content myself with sitting day and night as a sort of sentinel in the dressing-room.

"At length, a change for the better declared itself.

"My child was free from fever once again, though weak and helpless as a new-born babe.

"I cannot tell you, Miss Trafford, the deep joy and thankfulness I felt when I heard her speak to the nurse in her natural tones. I longed to rush to her bedside, but something kept me back, and the doctor approved of my self-restraint and begged I would wait till she asked for me.

"She is very weak," he said, gravely. "I dread any excitement for her. A return of fever would be fatal."

"How I waited and listened, and longed to hear her ask for me! But the days passed on, and for a week she never mentioned my name. Gradually the remembrance of what had passed on the night she was taken ill came back to her, but the doctor would not allow her to speak of it.

"Then she asked for me.

"Is Colonel Lonsdale, my father, here?" she said, in a strange, hesitating way.

"Here? Certainly! He has never left you," replied the doctor. "Shall I tell him to come to you, Miss Lisa?"

"I was at the door, longing for her to summon me. I could see her lying on her little white-curtained bed, looking so pale and attenuated, and yet so sweet and lovely; but when the doctor said these words, a look I shall never forget came over her face—a look of terror, loathing almost, and she replied, hurriedly. 'No, no! I cannot! Not yet, not yet!'

"Certainly not yet, if you prefer to wait!" he replied, a touch of surprise in his voice. "Don't distress yourself, my dear; you are weak yet!"

"Yes; I am weak," she answered. "I can put it off a little, can't I?"

"Certainly," answered the doctor, and I thought I detected a look of anxiety in the glance he cast on her; and then I shrunk away, bitterly grieved, and more hurt than I liked to own at my child's reluctance to see me.

"Well, she grew better, and at last I could bear the separation from her no longer.

"I entered her room one day without warning, and would have clasped her to my heart if she would have let me.

"But she shrunk from me, with a low cry of terror, and fell to weeping so bitterly that, dreading her excitement might bring back fever, I left her; and for nearly a week afterward I did not see her again.

"When I next met her I strove to be calm and self-restrained, and not to show that I remembered the repulse I had experienced at our last interview. To my surprise, she was perfectly calm, collected, and cool; greeted me distantly, as if I were a stranger; and a stranger to all intents I have been to her from that day to this."

CHAPTER IV.

A SHADOWED LOVE.

"AND the inquest?" I asked anxiously. "How did she bear herself at it?"

"As calmly as could be," he replied; "too calmly almost; her manner hardly seemed natural—at least, not to those who knew her. The coroner complimented her, I remember, on the clearness with which she gave her evidence; but to me it was a painful hearing."

"And what was her account of the matter?" I inquired, breathless with interest.

"She stated that she had sat up later than usual in her bedroom, had then, tempted by the beauty of the night, on coming down-stairs taken up her position in a favorite corner of the veranda; that suddenly she had heard two persons speaking in low, hurried tones, then a scuffling; and starting up, she, on reaching the steps leading from the veranda to the garden, had seen a man and woman on the edge of the cliff. The man, with an oath, had dashed the woman from him over the cliff and fled, and the sight had so overcome her with dread that she fainted, and remembered no more till she awoke to consciousness weeks afterward in her own bedroom.

"When questioned, she described accurately enough the face and figure of the woman whose body was found at the foot of the cliff—the moon had shone full on her face; but of the murderer's appearance her description was more vague—his back had been toward her, and beyond the general outline of his figure she could say little.

"She seemed a little troubled as she was cross questioned on this point; doubtless she feared that her description might point to some innocent person instead of the real offender, and she seemed relieved when the examination was at an end.

"When it was over, she took to her room and her bed again, and for some time we feared greatly for her mind.

"Her old dislike to my presence blazed up again, and it was then that I engaged Mrs. Parsons, her old governess and friend, as a companion for her.

"Solitude, I felt, was the worst thing in the world for her, and my company she would not endure. So things went on till we left Atlanticville, which we did as soon as she was strong enough to be moved; and though her behavior to me is far different now to what it was then, yet in reality the gulf between us is as broad as ever."

"Is that all?" I inquired, after a pause.

"Yes," he replied, in a hopeless tone; "there is nothing more to tell you. The murderer has never been traced; the name of his victim is

unknown, and my child is as unlike her old happy self as one could well imagine. She shuts herself up from society, makes no friends, takes no interest in anything, and is a stranger to me. What is the cause of it, Miss Trafford? Can you throw any light on this matter?"

He rose as he said these words, and began to pace the room in an agitated manner.

"Has she told you all, do you think?" I said at last, in a low voice. "Is she keeping anything back?"

"I think not," he replied, sadly.

"Pardon me if I suggest something," I said, hesitatingly; "but did you know—was Miss Lonsdale engaged at the time of this event?"

"Engaged!—to be married? Certainly not," he answered, in some surprise. "I had hoped from what I had observed in a certain quarter that she might have been, and to a man who above all others I would have chosen for her as a husband; but he had to leave Atlanticville suddenly, and his proposal by letter came too late. Lisa was lying stricken with fever when I received it, and he had left the States before I had time or leisure to write and tell him how impossible it was for me to discuss the matter with my child."

"And since she has been better, have you done so?" I asked.

"No," he answered sadly. "In her present condition I could not think of allowing any man to engage himself to her, and I fear it might disturb and vex her if I reverted to the past in any way."

"But does she never speak of Mr. — of this gentleman—never in any way allude to him?" I inquired.

"On several occasions his name has been mentioned in the public journals—he is one of the Government Arctic expedition I may tell you—and she speaks of him with the calm indifference she shows for every one," he replied.

"May not this be assumed?" I said; "may not a great part of Miss Lonsdale's depression be traced to a—a disappointment in love, Colonel Lonsdale?"

"I can hardly imagine so," he replied.

"Don't you think," I persisted, "that she may have really been attached to this gentleman without letting you see it? Do you not think it would be better, even now, to tell her what the contents of his letter were?"

"Do you think so," he rejoined, uneasily, "after this lapse of time?—he away, too, in such a distant region? Even if she were attached to him, could I, after a year's silence, reopen the question?"

"Doubtless he will write again when opportunity offers," I said; "and if so—"

"If so, and you think it a prudent course, I shall mention the subject to her," he said; "but I confess I doubt Mr. Sinclair's having made any deep impression on her heart. Except when we have come across his name in papers, as I said, she never has mentioned him. I have had many troubles in my life, Miss Trafford, but this woful change in my bright, happy Lisa has been harder for me to bear than almost any other. Before it came about I had suffered much, and had secret worries and troubles that none knew of or suspected, and which I was able to bear with fortitude and resignation as long as she was untouched by them; but this strange alienation from her, my only child, is sometimes almost more than I can bear."

I felt how true this was; how the year of trouble through which he had passed had changed him, handsome and vigorous-looking though he still was. My heart went out to him, as I thought of the pangs his daughter's coldness inflicted on him and for one moment I almost disliked her for her strange conduct.

"It is a great comfort to have some one to talk over one's troubles with, Miss Trafford," he said, with a rather melancholy smile, as he rose to leave me. "I only hope I have not tired your patience by my long, personal talk?"

"Nay; I think it is I who should apologize

for having obliged you to talk over such a sad period of your life," I answered.

And then we parted, he to return to Penton, and I to complete my household duties, which our conversation had somewhat interrupted.

An accident occurred a few days later, which made me certain that Lisa Lonsdale (whatever might be her manner to her father) in her inmost heart loved him dearly still.

Returning from the neighboring town, he was thrown from his horse, and the frightened animal dashed up to the house, and passed the drawing-room windows, where Lisa and I were sitting, riderless.

She rose, with a cry of terror.

"My father's horse! He has been thrown!—he must be hurt! Oh, Heaven! Save him!

And she rushed to the door, and out into the avenue toward the gates. I followed her.

"Oh, where is he?—where is he? My poor father!" she cried, wildly excited.

And when, a few moments later, we met his unconscious form, carried by several laborers on a roughly-improvised stretcher, her grief and terror knew no bounds.

"Heaven save him!" she muttered, wringing her hands. "Oh, Tina!" (she had never called me by my first name before), "can he be dead? Oh, say, he is not dead!"

"Be calm, my dear child," I replied. "He is not dead; only stunned. Do not cry so; you will be ill again."

"I'll!—what do I care? What does it matter, if only he is saved? Oh, it would be too horrible if he were to die!"

And she looked at him with such wild, scared eyes that I felt half-frightened.

He was laid on a sofa in the study, and presently he showed signs of coming round.

"You see, he has only been stunned," I said, to her reassuringly.

"Are you sure?" she whispered.

"Quite sure! There! his eyes are open! Speak to him, Lisa!" I answered.

She bent over him eagerly.

His eyes met hers, and he smiled affectionately, and held out his hand toward her.

"I have frightened you, my darling," he said, in a weak voice; "but I am all right now."

No sooner did the sound of his voice fall on her ear and her eyes catch his loving gaze than she drew back; the anxiety faded from her face, the eagerness from her manner, and the usual icy coldness that wounded his kind heart so sorely took its place.

"You are better?" she said. "That is well. I was foolish to have been so frightened. Miss Trafford, you must quite despise me for my want of nerve. I will leave my father with you now; I know he is in good keeping."

And she left the room; but, notwithstanding the coldness of her words and manner, I could see during the next few days that her anxiety for his recovery was great and real, though she professed to despise herself for her weakness, as she called it, in being so much frightened when the accident occurred.

CHAPTER V.

ELEANOR'S LOVER.

A FEW days later, and our rector, Mr. Dacre, walked up to the house, with a look on his handsome, thoughtful face that made me certain he had something of importance to tell us.

I saw Eleanor's color rise and her eyes brighten as he entered, and I noticed how his eyes sought her face the instant he stood among us.

What was going to follow?

Was I then to lose one of my darlings before we had been a year together?

The rector's first words, however, were quite different to what I had expected.

"Miss Trafford," he said, going to the point at once, as was his wont, "I am going to leave Bridgeport."

"Leave!" cried Emma and I, in tones of utter consternation, while Eleanor said not a word, but stooped to pick up her ball of wool,

which just then fell from her hands and rolled a little way under the table.

She looked quite white, however, when she resumed her seat.

"I've been appointed rector of the Episcopal church at Newton. I only heard of it last night. A fine salary and an important parish; but I shall be very sorry to leave this."

"Oh must you go?" cried Emma. "Mr. Dacre what shall we do without you? What will the people do? And the poor—think of them!"

"Of course, Mr. Dacre did think before he decided to go," said Eleanor, in a quiet voice, though I saw her lip tremble.

He looked at her as if greatly relieved.

"I'm glad you think *that*, Miss Eleanor," he said. "I would have been better pleased to have been left alone; but since this most important parish has been offered me, I do not feel I should be doing right to refuse. It will be hard work, and I shall be far from all my old friends; but that would not justify me in refusing."

"Of course not," I said, slowly. "When do you leave us, then, Mr. Dacre? Bridgeport won't be like itself without you, and we shall all miss you terribly."

He looked at Eleanor as I said these words; but her eyes were fixed on her work, and she was knitting as fast as if life depended on the sock being finished before night.

"Oh, in a month, or perhaps a little sooner. That depends. My successor is to be Tamlin—James Tamlin—an old college friend of mine, with a charming wife and five or six children," he rejoined.

"Five or six children!" cried Emma. "Fancy five or six children let loose in your beautiful garden, Mr. Dacre, rushing in and out among the beds and rose-bushes, and turning the whole house upside down!"

"But I dare say Mrs. Tamlin wouldn't allow that," interposed Eleanor, mildly; "it would be too dreadful."

"Oh, you'll find her a strict disciplinarian, Miss Emma," said Mr. Dacre, with a laugh. "You and she will become great friends, I foresee."

Emma made a grimace, while Eleanor looked at her with mild reproach in her soft brown eyes.

"Have you told any one about it yet?" she asked; "the Lonsdales or—"

"No, Miss Eleanor, I came here first; I came to tell you all—you being my oldest friends," he answered.

"Newton is a beautiful place," I said, in order to break the pause that followed this speech.

"Lovely, I believe. I have never been there. It is quite a large town, and the scenery is beautiful; and in summer, of course, the place is thronged. I think you would like it, Miss Eleanor; there would be plenty of subjects for your pencil there."

Eleanor murmured an inaudible reply, and rose to leave the room. I saw her lips quivering, and felt certain she was on the point of bursting into tears. So I covered her retreat as best I could, asking her to take a message for me to the gardener (who I knew was in a distant part of the orchard), so that she might have time to recover her equanimity.

"Poor child!" I thought. "I suspected it all along. She loves him. I wonder—oh, I hope she has not given her heart in vain!"

Mr. Dacre watched her as she left the room with a thoughtful gaze, was silent for some moments, and then entered into a desultory conversation with Emma on various parish matters. Showing no intention, however, of leaving us, she took up her hat, and declared that "Granny" Mason would be expecting her, and she must go off to read to her at once.

"Mr. Tamlin will have excellent help in the parish from you and Miss Emma," he said, after my sister had departed.

"From Emma and Eleanor, you mean," I answered. "I fear I am not half so active in visiting as they."

"You have them and your house to look

after, you see," he replied; and sat silently looking out across the lawn, as if he were expecting Eleanor to return.

"Miss Eleanor is a long time giving that message to Jones," he said at last, with a half-smile. "I've a word to say to Jones, too, if you'll let me go down into the orchard."

And without waiting for my permission, Mr. Dacre left the room, and in another moment I saw his tall form striding across the lawn, and down the walk that led to the orchard.

His talk with Jones must have been a long and important one, if it lasted all the time he was away, and Eleanor must have had enough of it; but when nearly an hour passed, and neither she nor the rector returned, and I had observed Jones leave the garden and go into the poultry-yard, I began to feel very sure that he was not the person who was detaining them.

So, putting on my hat, I went slowly down toward the orchard.

"If it were Eleanor he wished to speak to, surely he has had time enough to say all he could want. He's been gone" (and I took out my watch) "just an hour, and dinner will be coming on table presently."

I stopped at the orchard gate, and called softly:

"Eleanor—Eleanor!"

I heard voices in the distance, but my call remained unheeded.

So peeping over the gate, I looked round the orchard, and there, under my favorite apple-tree, I saw the rector and my sister, seated on a rustic bench.

Her eyes were bent on the ground; but a happy smile was on her face, which was blushing with pleasure. One hand held her hat, and the other was clasped in the rector's, who was eagerly talking to her.

Seeing this I prudently withdrew, and retired to the drawing-room again.

"Where's Eleanor?" cried Emma, coming in half an hour later. "I've a message for her from Mrs. Green; and—"

"I sent Eleanor on a message to Jones—don't you remember?" I replied demurely—"and she hasn't come back yet."

"Not come back! Why, that was two hours ago! What do you mean, Tina?" she answered doubtfully.

"Just what I say. Mr. Dacre went to look for her more than an hour ago, and he hasn't come back yet either," I rejoined.

"Oh!" cried Emma, sitting down suddenly, quite aghast. "Tina, Eleanor will have to go to Newton—mark my words!"

"Probably. Mr. Dacre said he thought she would like the place," I answered.

"And what shall we do?" she inquired woefully.

"Oh, stay where we are, and help Mrs. Tamlin to mind her children and the parish. Here they come at last, Emma."

And I pointed in the direction of the walk. Emma gave one look, and a little well-pleased cry.

"I am going—I'll make myself scarce; they'll want to tell you alone. Dear Nell, how happy she looks; but it's awful for us."

And so saying she fled from the room.

"Your conversation with Jones has been a long one, Mr. Dacre," I said. "Nelly, did you give him my message?"

She started.

"Oh! dear, Tina, I quite forgot; I hadn't time."

"Not time!" I laughed.

"I—I mean Mr. Dacre came, and then—Oh, Reginald! tell her!" faltered Eleanor.

"I can guess, I think," I replied.

"Ah! Miss Trafford, she has promised to come to Newton—think of that!—as my wife. What do you say to it? Will you be content with me for a brother-in-law?"

"Far more than merely content!" I answered, kissing Eleanor, and shaking the rector by the hand warmly. "I could not have hoped for a happier fate for my Nelly than to be your wife, Mr. Dacre."

"Oh, Tina, how nice of you! I knew you would be pleased," whispered Eleanor. "Oh, I am so happy!"

"There! run away and tell Emma, then," I said.

And glad of an excuse to hide her happy tears, Eleanor ran off to her room to tell the news to her sister.

"Thank Heaven, that's settled!" cried Mr. Dacre, with a sigh of relief, throwing himself into a chair beside me. "Do you know, Miss Trafford, I was horribly afraid she did not care for me this morning, when I told you of my plans. She took my going so calmly, I almost believed I had been deceiving myself. Hadn't it been that I saw her wiping her eyes as she crossed the lawn, I don't think I should have had the courage to speak to her to-day."

"I'm thankful you did," I replied. "Nelly feels deeply, but does not show her feelings. I felt pretty sure of her feelings for you, and noticed, though you did not, how much she suffered when you announced your intention of leaving Bridgeport."

"Poor darling, how blind I was!" he cried. "Never mind; I shall soon learn to know her better. I don't think, indeed, that I shall ever misunderstand her again."

"You did not find her very obdurate, I fancy," I laughed.

"No, no; she was goodness itself to me. She thinks too well of me, Miss Trafford," he replied, feelingly.

"Hum! no, I can't allow that," I replied. "Neither can I allow you to call me Miss Trafford any more."

"Well, Tina, then. I declare I feel as if it were cruel of me to rob you of such a treasure as Eleanor," he went on.

"We shall miss her. I don't know if you'll get Emma to forgive you; but as it is for Nelly's happiness, I will pardon the offense," I answered.

Presently Emma entered, followed by the blushing Eleanor, and after a wordy warfare, Emma and the rector made their peace, and we sat down to dinner together, as happy a party as could be found in all the town, although the cook did send up a warning message that the dinner was all burnt to a cinder through waiting so long.

"I wonder what the Lonsdales will think of it?" said Emma, as she and I went back to the drawing-room after dinner, leaving the lovers to wander out into the garden alone.

"The Lonsdales? Why, what matter will it be to them?" I replied. "I am sure Colonel Lonsdale will be delighted. We must ask Miss Lonsdale to be bridesmaid, Emma."

"Do you think she would?" replied Emma, doubtfully.

"Why not?" I rejoined, rather surprised. "She likes Eleanor so much, I think it would please her to be asked."

"Perhaps! She would make a lovely bridesmaid; I should look dreadfully homely beside her; but I wonder would she like it? My idea, Tina, is that Miss Lonsdale has been crossed in love, and weddings may not be in favor just now. You know her best, though. She likes you twice as much as she does either Eleanor or me. If you think she wouldn't mind—"

"I'll ask the colonel first; and as to Lisa Lonsdale being crossed in love, remember that is quite a fancy of your own, child. We have no reason to think so really. Don't spread such an idea."

"Oh, I would not think of saying such a thing except to you, Tina!" rejoined Emma; "and I only hope she will be bridesmaid, for a prettier one we could not find. Here are the newly-engaged couple returning from their walk. I will go and look after five o'clock tea, which must follow very close on dinner to-day, as Jones and they kept us waiting so long."

CHAPTER VI.

THE MYSTERY DEEPENS.

THE news of Eleanor's engagement soon spread, and we were overwhelmed with con-

gratulations and visits from our friends and acquaintances. But I do not think that any of them were more delighted with the news than were Lisa and Colonel Lonsdale.

Lisa's sad face brightened into positive sunshine when I told her; and when I broached the subject of bridesmaid she looked for an instant quite joyful; then in another moment some terrible remembrance seemed to take possession of her—the old cloud settled on her brow, her voice resumed its usual tone of sadness, and though she contrived to talk of Eleanor's prospects with interest, and agreed to be bridesmaid without demur, yet her tone and manner were joyless, as if the sorrow she hid so carefully in her inmost heart forbade her to do more than sympathize distantly in our happiness.

It was settled that the marriage was to take place late in the autumn, so as to allow of an October tour before the newly-married couple took possession of their new home. And so it came to pass that my time for the next few weeks was much occupied, and I saw but little of the Lonsdales—less of the colonel than of his daughter, however, for Lisa would often drive over in her pony-carriage and spend the afternoon with the girls.

"Ah! here is news of the long unheard-of Arctic expedition," said Reginald Dacre one afternoon, as we all sat together under the shade of the walnut-tree in the orchard. "They seem to have done wonders, and to have accomplished more in the comparatively short time they have been absent than any other expedition that has preceded them. They'll be going into winter-quarters in a month or two, I suppose."

I looked quickly at Lisa as he spoke, and saw for an instant a look of intense anxiety come into her eyes.

I thought she was about to ask for further news—perhaps to ask Mr Dacre to read all that was said of it in the paper—but suddenly the flush died out of her cheek, the anxious light from her eyes; she kept back the half-uttered words, and busied herself silently with her work.

"Do they mention any of the officers?" I asked, anxious to see what effect my question might have on Lisa.

"Yes, several: Captain Boscowen, Mr. Chambers, Mr. Sinclair,"—I saw Lisa start—he replied.

"And what of them?" I asked.

"They seem to be the leading spirits of the whole crew," he answered. "Poor Sinclair has suffered a good deal, though, it seems; and it is doubtful if his health will permit him to chance another winter. Miss Lonsdale, are you going so soon?"

Lisa had risen, pale as death, and taken up her hat.

"I think so; it is late. Mrs. Parsons may be expecting me," she stammered. "Good-night, Miss Trafford. Mr. Dacre, would you kindly see if my carriage is ready?"

And spite of the two girls' protestations and entreaties, she insisted on going home.

"I wonder what disturbed her so?" said Emma, thoughtfully; "for she was disturbed, there is no doubt, by something. She has been so much more cheerful and like other people of late, that I am sorry to see her giving way to her whims again. She is so sweet and charming when she shakes off that perpetual brooding melancholy."

A week passed, and we saw nothing more of Lisa; neither had the colonel been once to see us, and I confess I began to miss his visits.

One evening as I was sitting alone in the study I saw him ride up to the door, and presently heard his well-known voice asking for me.

Something unusual had happened I felt sure, for there was a ring of eagerness, almost joy, in its tone.

"Miss Trafford," he cried, "do you know that I begin to believe I have the key to the mystery of my child's changed manner and

constant melancholy? I fear I have been very blind and stupid. Read this." And he handed me a letter.

It was from Mr. Sinclair, begging for a more definite reply to the letter he had sent the colonel on the morning he quitted home.

"Miss Lonsdale"—the letter ran—"is, I sincerely trust, restored to health long ere this. Will you not put me out of my misery, colonel, by letting me know as soon as may be if you approve of my suit, and that the hopes I entertain of having won her love are not unfounded? I think I am not presumptuous in believing that after what she said to me at our last meeting I am not wholly indifferent to her."

"Now, what I can't understand is—" began the colonel, and then he stopped. "It is strange," he continued, "that she never should have mentioned that last meeting to me, nor what passed at it."

"When did it take place? How long before the—the murder?" I asked.

"Why, now you come to speak of it, it was that very evening. Sinclair left next morning, and when his letter reached me, Lisa was ill, raving with delirium."

A strange feeling came over me as he spoke. I looked at him, and suddenly his cheek blanched—the same idea had evidently passed through our brains at one and the same moment! A monstrous and absurd idea, however, that we both summarily dismissed.

"I think I ought to show this letter to Lisa at once," he said, after a pause.

"Certainly!" I replied.

"She may have been expecting to hear of or from him all this time; but I rather dread the manner in which she may receive the news from me; and—don't think me a coward, Miss Trafford—but I have come over to ask you to be present, and help me to talk to her on the subject."

"Most willingly," I replied. "When shall I come?"

"I think to-morrow, if you are not too busy," he answered.

And then he bade me good-night; but as I thought over the letter, I felt very nervous.

Was Emma right, then?—and was Lisa's melancholy the effect of disappointed love? Did her coldness to her father arise, perchance, from the mistaken idea that he had in some way separated her lover from her, or was there a deeper cause yet for it?

I had intended to start for Penton early next day, but something hindered me, and instead of arriving at eleven o'clock, I did not get there till past twelve.

I heard voices as I neared the drawing-room door, and felt that the colonel had broached the subject of Mr. Sinclair's proposal without waiting for my arrival.

I was right. Lisa, it seemed, had been in a gentler and happier mood than usual that morning; the colonel had taken courage and showed her Sinclair's letter without delay.

It had upset her terribly, I saw at a glance.

"Tina, Tina!" she cried, calling me by my Christian name, as she always did when anything moved her deeply; "speak for me!—speak to papa for me."

"About what, my dear Lisa?" I replied, quietly.

"About this. Here; read it!" And she gave me Mr. Sinclair's letter. "Tell him it is impossible; that I can not—I dare not marry him!"

"You dare not? Lisa, what can you mean?" interrupted Colonel Lonsdale, in a bewildered tone. "Why can you not marry Sinclair, as good and honest a fellow as ever lived?"

"I shall never marry!" she replied, passionately. "Father, do not urge me."

"If you do not care for this gentleman, Lisa, I feel certain that—"

"Whether I care for him or not," she interrupted, a look of agony crossing her face, "is not the question. He may be—nay, I know he is—good, honest, honorable—all that my father says; but" (and here she sighed deeply) "I can never be his wife!"

"But," said the colonel, gently, "that is

nonsense, Lisa! My dear child, be sensible; let us talk the matter over quietly. Ask Miss Trafford what she thinks of it. Here is a man whom you used to like, and who—"

"Used to like!" murmured Lisa, with a wild light in her eye of repressed agony. "Well, yes, perhaps. But I am changed now to what I used to be, father."

"And that is just what makes us so concerned about you, darling," continued Colonel Lonsdale, anxiously. "Why should you be changed? Why should you be sad, anxious, and depressed?"

"Father," she cried, in a strange voice, in which I could detect terror as well as trouble, "have I had nothing to change me, then?"

"Yes; a shock—an illness. But you are strong and well now, thank Heaven! and should try to shake off these nervous terrors—these imaginations that—"

"Imaginations!—nervous terrors! Are they so?" she said, breathlessly, in a low tone, fixing her large, dark eyes on her father's face, as if she would read his very soul.

"Surely you must know they are, whatever they may be, my child," he replied, with reproachful tenderness.

She kept her eyes fixed on his face for a moment longer; then dropped them with a deep sigh, and turned away; and in an instant all the warmth and eagerness had died out of her manner, and when she spoke again it was in her coldest, quietest tones.

"If you say so, father, it must be so," she said; "but be that as it may my resolution is not altered. If I do not wish to marry Mr. Sinclair, I presume you will not attempt to force me to do so?"

"Lisa, you are unjust!" he answered, almost sternly. "Have I ever treated you tyrannically—have I ever tried to force you to act against your wishes?"

"Then you will no more urge me to marry Mr. Sinclair," she answered, "for I do not wish to—I shall never marry."

"That is rather a hasty resolution," I said, with a smile. "As your father says, Lisa, you should think well before you refuse such an offer as this, coming, too, as it does from a man I know you—well, like, we will say."

She looked at me with rather a startled expression.

"Do you know Mr. Sinclair?" she asked.

"No; but I have seen him once," I replied.

"Where?" she asked.

"At Atlanticville," I answered shortly.

She was silent; then, sighing again, she got up and walked slowly to the window.

"You will answer Mr. Sinclair's letter, father, I presume?" she said calmly.

"Certainly; and am I to give the death-blow to his hopes, then?" answered Colonel Lonsdale, almost bitterly.

I saw her shudder at his words, and it was a moment or two before she answered:

"You must tell him it cannot be."

"Oh, Lisa, Lisa!" I said, "think how he will suffer when he gets the letter, far away from home and friends as he is! Can you give him no hope, dear?"

I shall never forget the solemn mournfulness of her low, sad voice as she replied, "None, Tina—there is no hope; I can give him none."

The colonel looked at me in despair.

"You can have a fortnight to think of it, Lisa," he said; "there will be no need to write before then."

"It will be all the same," she replied, without looking at him. "Do not let us talk about it again, father."

"Not unless you think better of it, Lisa. Indeed, my dear child, your strange conduct grieves me more than I can tell you. I had almost made up my mind that— But tell me, darling, do you know anything against Sinclair that makes you doubt his fitness, his worthiness to be your husband?"

"Anything against him?—I?" she cried, turning to him, her eyes flaming and her cheeks all aglow. "Victor Sinclair is fit to be the husband of a queen! Any woman might

be proud to be honored by his love! What could I possibly have learned to his detriment, noble, good, and true that he is?"

"Then all I can say is that you are a perfect enigma to me, Lisa," returned her father, sadly.

Again the searching look came into her eyes as she fixed them on him, and, as before, as quickly passed away.

"I'm sorry we troubled Miss Trafford," she said, more quietly, "there really was no necessity to inflict this family matter on her. She can take no interest in it, nor understand how I feel on the subject."

She spoke almost haughtily, and I confess her tone hurt me.

"You are wrong," I said; "I take an interest in everything that concerns you, Lisa."

"Forgive me!" she cried, repentantly, throwing her arms round my neck and kissing me.

Then, without speaking again to her father, she left the room.

"It is hopeless, I fear!" said Colonel Lonsdale, despondingly. "Poor child!—poor Sinclair!—I quite believed she cared for him."

"And so did I!" I said, incautiously.

"What?" he cried, eagerly; "did she ever speak to you about him?"

"No," I answered; and then I felt myself bound to narrate what I had seen on the beach that evening at Atlanticville.

"And which evening was it?" he asked.

"The evening my poor uncle was taken so ill, and you were sent for," I said almost reluctantly.

"What?—the evening of the night on which the murder was committed?" he cried.

Involuntarily I started from my seat.

"Was the murder committed on that night?" I exclaimed.

"Yes; didn't you know it? It was on returning from your uncle's that I found Lisa insensible, and—you know the rest," he answered.

We were silent, and, the clock striking two, I rose to go, but before leaving Penton I stole up to Lisa's room to bid her good-by.

The door was half-open, and I heard the sound of sobs.

There, on her knees by the sofa, her face buried in her hands, knelt Lisa, sobbing as if her heart would break.

"Oh, Victor! Victor! I shall never see you again—never—never!" she murmured.

I withdrew silently.

Perhaps tears would bring her relief. It would be best to let her grief have free course.

But if she loved him—as she evidently did—why did she so obstinately persist in refusing him?

It was a mystery to me, and I felt it would be so to her father also.

I mentioned to him a few days later what I had overheard and seen, and he decided to postpone the sending of the letter which should have conveyed Lisa's refusal to Mr. Sinclair to a future occasion.

"I only wish he could come home and plead his suit himself," said the colonel. "Perhaps he might succeed where we have failed."

And I wished so, too, with all my heart. It grieved me to see Colonel Lonsdale so troubled about his child; it grieved and angered me almost to see the shrinking distrust and timidity with which she treated him, the coldness with which she received his many acts of love and kindness, the almost aversion she evinced for his society.

I thought he was a man who deserved the full love and confidence of his child, and whom any daughter might have been proud to love and obey and devote her life to.

What was the cause of Lisa's strange conduct toward him? Did she really feel all the indifference she exhibited, or was her disregard for his love, her apparent shrinking from him, as unreal as the indifference she had expressed for Mr. Sinclair?

CHAPTER VII.

WOODED AND MARRIED.

It was a relief to me to see the happy faces gathered round the dinner-table at home, when I returned to Sunnyside.

Reginald Dacre and Eleanor met me at the door, and on entering I found Emma talking to a pleasant-looking young man, with fair hair and a sweeping blonde mustache, whom Reginald introduced as his cousin, Captain Coventry, and his proposed best man at the wedding.

"We were just going to begin dinner without you, Tina," cried Emma. "What did Lisa want you for this morning? How tired you look! There is nothing wrong at Penton, is there?"

"Nothing at all," I replied. "Lisa was a little contrary, that was all," I added, seeing Emma look at me rather searchingly.

"Ah, poor girl! We have a dear, capricious beauty close to us, Captain Coventry, whom you will meet at the wedding. She is to be my fellow-bridesmaid," said Emma.

"Oh! a capricious beauty," he replied, laughing. "I shall be afraid of her, Miss Emma. Is she very haughty and repellent?"

"Oh, no; a sweet girl," I answered. "But yet she has her whims."

"Like all ladies," laughed Mr. Dacre. "Here is Eleanor declaring that she will not let me fit up her sitting-room from Elkingham's; that Brown and Co.'s things are quite good enough for her."

"Brown and Co.'s!" repeated Emma disdainfully, tossing her pretty little head. "My dear Eleanor!"

And then we talked of a dozen things connected with the approaching marriage, but I confess the sad, handsome face of Colonel Lonsdale haunted me the whole day, and even in my dreams that night.

I did not see much of Lisa during the weeks that intervened till the wedding-day dawned—the day that was to take our dear, gentle Eleanor from under our roof forever.

She had been over once or twice, but had given up her frequent morning visits to Sunnyside, and I thought treated me with a shade of coldness.

I had very little time, however, to think of her behavior, so much had I to do at home, and so deeply was I wrapped up in plans and arrangements for Eleanor and her future.

At length everything was completed. The last trunk was packed, the last direction written, and I saw Eleanor look pensively at the baggage labeled "Mrs. Reginald Dacre."

Yes; to-morrow she would be Eleanor Dacre—Eleanor Trafford no longer.

The morning broke dim and hazy, as autumn mornings often do; but as the sun rose higher, and higher, the mists dispersed, and when I went to awake the bride the sky was blue and clear, and the birds sung almost as merrily in the trees as if it had been springtime.

"Awake, my darling," I said, stooping over her and kissing her, tears coming into my eyes when I thought it was the last time, perhaps, she would lie awake in her own old room, or that I should wake her with my usual kiss. "It is time to get up; don't you know what day this is?"

"Oh, Tina, I was dreaming such a happy dream!" she said, opening her eyes; "we were all so happy!"

"And now you wake to a happy reality, darling," I replied. "Come, get up! It is past eight, and at nine Lisa will be here to breakfast, and at eleven we must be at the church."

So she rose, and for the last time I helped her twist the masses of her glorious dark hair around her graceful head, and, when her toilet was complete, accompanied her to the breakfast room.

We were met on the stairs by Emma, carrying three splendid bouquets—one pure white for the bride and two of roses and choice hot house flowers for the bridesmaids.

"Just see what that delightful Captain Coventry has sent us!" she cried. "Did you ever see anything so lovely?"

"Beautiful indeed!" I cried.

"Hasn't he good taste, Tina? How splendidly they are arranged. And here is a parcel for you, Eleanor, from Captain Coventry also."

She put a little case into Eleanor's hand.

It contained a beautiful diamond spray, with which the young man begged the bride would do him the honor of fastening her veil.

"How lovely!" she cried. "Too grand almost for a clergyman's wife; but I must wear it, I suppose."

"Must, indeed!" cried Emma. "It will be just the thing, Nelly, and will sparkle magnificently in your dark hair."

"Captain Coventry must be rich to afford such a gift," I said, examining the spray.

"Yes; didn't you know?" said Eleanor, innocently. "Reginald says he has twenty thousand a year, and when his uncle dies will be still richer."

"Twenty thousand a year!" cried Emma, looking, I thought, a little downcast. "Dear me! and I never for a moment fancied he was a person of any means. Well, his wealth has not had the effect of spoiling him. I never found out even that he was rich!"

"What! do people go about the world telling how rich they are?" asked Eleanor, laughing.

"No; but somehow they generally give themselves airs, and manage to let you know it. Who is the uncle, Nelly?" replied Emma.

"Oh, Admiral Collington, the owner of the Hall, I believe! Reginald's uncle, too, you know—his mother's brother," rejoined Nelly.

"Then he'll be his heir—rich and a 'swell.' Oh, dear, I never could have imagined it!"

And I thought Emma's face fell again.

"Does it distress you?" I said, laughing.

"No," she answered, thoughtfully; "but I think, for all that, I should have been better pleased if he had been poor—or poorer, at any rate—and—not a 'swell,' Tina."

"It can't hurt you, child," I rejoined.

"No, perhaps it can't," she replied, quietly. "Well, now we must think of other things. Ah, here is Lisa, and the bride must be arrayed!"

She was soon ready, and Emma fastened her long white veil with the diamond spray Captain Coventry had sent.

She looked grave and thoughtful as she did so, and I wondered what was passing through her little head.

Lisa looked beautiful in her bridesmaid's dress, and for the moment quite as cheerful as I had ever seen her; and I could not help whispering to her, as we left the bride's dressing-room, that some day I hoped I should have the pleasure of assisting at her bridal toilette.

"I prophesy you will be the next, Lisa," I said.

"Never!" she answered, so firmly that I was quite startled; "I shall never marry, Tina. It is far more likely I shall assist at your wedding than you at mine."

"My wedding!" I cried. "Why, Lisa, all the world knows I am an old maid."

"Not so very old," she replied, with a saucy nod and a smile, which, however, faded away somewhat suddenly.

We found several guests in the drawing-room, and the clock warned us that it was time to start for church.

So we set off—I, Colonel Lonsdale, and the bride in one carriage; the bridesmaids and best man in another.

The church—which had been prettily decorated—was crowded with friends, and I could hear murmurs of admiration as the bride entered the vestibule, and, followed by her sister and Lisa, walked up the aisle—I on one side of her and Colonel Lonsdale on the other.

She was met half-way by Reginald Dacre and Captain Coventry, and I thought, as I looked at the group assembled at the altar rails, that a handsomer wedding-party it would be surely hard to find.

Eleanor all grace and sweetness; Reginald a picture of manly beauty; Emma fair and lovely as a lily; Lisa with her dark, soft eyes and perfect features; Captain Coventry, with his

sunny smile and clear-cut, aristocratic profile; and last, though not least, Colonel Lonsdale, who, I thought, could bear comparison with either of the younger men, in spite of his five-and-forty years.

Amid a perfect shower of flowers, Eleanor and her husband, after the ceremony was over, regained their carriage, and soon we were at the cottage again, seated at the wedding-breakfast.

Then the bride rose and retired to change her dress; the carriage came round, the last adieux were said, and the newly-married pair started on their tour.

For some minutes I could hardly realize it was all over, and sat half-stunned in the little boudoir—where Emma and Eleanor had been wont to pass their mornings—listening to the cheers that were brought to my ears by the breeze as the carriage drove through the village, hardly able to believe that Eleanor had gone from us forever!—that only Emma and I would inhabit the cottage now!

And then came the thought, with a pang, how long should I be likely to keep Emma with me!—would she not soon go too, and then should I not be quite alone?

Colonel Lonsdale's voice roused me from my sad thoughts.

"Well, all has gone off capitally, Miss Trafford," he said, cheerfully; "but how tired you look!"

"No, I'm not tired," I repeated, rather ruefully; "but oh, I shall miss her so! and who knows how long it may be before Emma follows in her footsteps, and I am left a dreary old maid?"

I attempted to laugh as I said this, but, I fancy, failed signally.

"You an old maid!" he replied, looking surprised. "Well, I confess I never looked on you in that light, Miss Trafford."

"But I have always considered myself one, and never cared about it till to-day, now. But" (and I brightened up) "I need not mind; I need never be idle. I can always go back to the hospital."

He looked at me strangely.

"To the hospital! I hope you will never do that," he said.

"Why not? I was very happy there," I answered.

"But think of us; we could not spare you," he rejoined.

"Oh! when Emma and Lisa are both married, I shall have nothing to keep me at home—I sha'n't be wanted," I said, laughingly.

"You forget; I shall be left alone if Lisa marries," he said, slowly.

"Ah! but you are a man, so it doesn't matter," I answered.

"Don't you think so? There I differ with you, Miss Trafford," he answered, with a sigh, looking for a moment as if my words had hurt him, and I fancied he was going to say more; but, on second thoughts, he held his peace, and Captain Coventry's voice was heard calling him.

"Miss Lonsdale and Mrs. Parsons are waiting for you, colonel," he said, coming in.

"I must say good-by, then," he said, turning and holding out his hand to me. "Miss Trafford, now that the wedding is over, and you are not so busy at home, I hope we shall see more of you at Penton; and as to the hospital—"

"Oh! I shall certainly have to return there some day, I foresee that!" I rejoined, as I heard Emma and Captain Coventry talking in low tones in the porch.

"Don't say so! If I can influence you, be sure you shall not," he said, earnestly, holding my hand in his as he spoke.

"There are Lina and Mrs. Parsons in the carriage; I must say good-by!" I said withdrawing it hurriedly, and hastening out into the passage, feeling that, for an old maid, I was blushing very foolishly, and really quite without reason.

"How well you look—only a little flushed, dear Miss Trafford," said Mrs. Parsons, as

bade her good-by. "I hope all this excitement won't be too much for you."

"Come and see me soon, Tina," said Lisa, as the carriage drove off, and I nodded and waved my hand.

Colonel Lonsdale bowed, and without daring to raise my eyes to his, I re-entered the house.

"How foolish I am! What has come over me?" I thought. And I really felt angry with myself when I noticed my flushing cheeks, and marveled to think how a few chance words, which had probably meant nothing, had sent my silly heart beating.

There was no one by, however, to see my emotion. All our guests had departed, and Emma and Captain Coventry had wandered out into the garden, and I heard their merry voices and laughter in the direction of the orchard.

I sat down in the arm-chair by the window, my favorite place, and fell into a reverie; and then sleep overtook me, and it was not till Emma's voice roused me that I woke.

"We—Captain Coventry and I. I mean—have left you alone a long time, I'm afraid, Tina; but I really didn't know—I forgot how time was going," she said.

"And I haven't the least idea of the hour," I said. "Why, it's five o'clock!"—and I looked at the clock.

"Yes, time for me to be saying good-by; but if you'll allow me, Miss Trafford, I'm going to ride over from the Hall to-morrow with some books for Miss Emma?"

"With pleasure," I replied. "Do you remain long with your friends, then?"

"Oh, some weeks, I hope," he answered, with a bright smile. "I always liked the Hall, but this year it seems more delightful than ever. Good-by!"

"What a frank, charming fellow, and how handsome!" I said, after he had left us.

"Do you think so?" said Emma, gravely.

"Certainly; don't you?" I replied, rather in surprise.

"Ye-es," she rejoined; "but, oh! I do wish he were not so rich, and Admiral Collington's heir."

"Hum!" I rejoined; "I don't see that it matters."

"We are so poor," she rejoined, simply.

"There are diversities of position in this world," I answered, demurely. "It wouldn't do for every one to be poor, you know."

But Emma still looked pensive.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHAT WAS HER SECRET.

WE saw a good deal of Captain Coventry during the next few weeks; then a telegram, announcing the serious illness of his uncle in Florida, reached him, and he had to leave the Hall quite suddenly for the South.

He had only a few hours to prepare for his start, but he managed to ride over to Sunnyside to bid us good-by. Unfortunately Emma was out, and I saw at once what a bitter disappointment it was to him.

"I wish I could stay till your sister returns," he said, looking wistfully across the garden; "but time presses. At any rate, I hope to be back in a few weeks, and then—"

He did not finish his sentence, but I saw a soft, tender smile on his lips. I could easily guess what he was thinking of, and for Emma's sake my heart rejoiced.

"Good-by!" he said. "Tell Emma—tell your sister I shall not be happy till I am back again, and—don't let her—don't forget me!"

"No fear of that," I replied, heartily; and watched him from the doorstep, as he rode hurriedly away.

"What a prospect for you, little Emma!" I thought. "But she is worthy of him and he of her, which is saying a good deal. But, oh, what shall I do without her?"

"Darling," I said, when, half an hour later, Emma came in, "Captain Coventry has been here to wish us good-by."

She turned quite pale, and the flowers she

carried in her hand fell unheeded to the ground.

"Is he going to leave us, then?" she said, in a low, pained voice.

"Only for a time. His uncle is ill, and has telegraphed for him."

"Oh, is that all? How you frightened me, Tina! But when will he be back?" she answered, with a sigh of relief.

"In a few weeks; and he begs you will not forget him. I felt myself justified in saying I thought you would not. Was I right—eh?" I replied, mischievously.

"Forget him? Of course not! But did he really say that, or are you teasing me, Tina?" she said, looking at me gravely.

"He really said so, and looked quite anxious about it, and was dreadfully put out at not seeing you. Do you think you will be able to exist without him for six weeks, my dear?"

"Tina, how can you?" she cried, blushing rosy red.

And in another moment she was in my arms, sobbing as if her heart would break.

I kissed and petted and tried in every way to comfort her. I longed to tell her of Captain Coventry's unfinished speech; but dared not, although in my own mind I was certain of what it meant.

Week after week passed, however, and Captain Coventry did not return. He wrote to me once or twice, and I could see how anxious he was to get back, but his uncle still lay in a critical state, and he could not leave him.

So winter came and passed, and nothing particular happened till spring returned.

Then Colonel Lonsdale informed us one day that he had decided on going abroad with Lisa and Mrs. Parsons, and would probably be absent several months.

"So we shall be quieter here than ever," I said, regretfully.

"Yes; we shall miss Lisa terribly," added Emma. "I wish people would not go away."

"I wish I had not to go, I assure you," said the colonel. "It's more on Lisa's account than my own."

"Yes; Lisa mentioned to me once that she thought she would like to travel abroad," I said.

"I am in hopes the change may do Lisa good. How do you think her looking, Miss Trafford?"

And he lowered his voice, and sat down beside me as he spoke.

Emma rose quietly and left the room.

"Better in health, decidedly, and more cheerful by far. Don't you think so?" I said.

"Perhaps," he replied, doubtfully.

"And Mr. Sinclair—have you any news of him?" I asked.

He shook his head.

"None whatever; and she never mentions him," he replied.

A week later the Lonsdales had started, and for another month Emma and I led our usual quiet life, till one morning I received a letter from Cecil Coventry, telling us his uncle was dead, and that in a few days he hoped to be North again.

"I have chanced to meet an old school friend," he wrote, "just returned to the United States from the uttermost parts of the earth. He has been a great help and comfort to me, and will accompany me home to the Hall."

"I suppose he is wealthier than ever now his uncle is dead. I wish he wasn't," and Emma looked uneasy.

"Do you? Well, I don't think his change of prospects will affect him much. Let me see; when was this letter written? Why, I declare, a week ago! To-morrow, or next day, he ought to be here." And I handed the letter to Emma.

I saw her color come and go as she read it, and her hand tremble as she handed it back to me, with a soft sigh.

"I shall be very glad to see him again," she said, simply.

"Of course. So shall I be. I wonder what sort of a person the friend will be?"

A few days later (he was unavoidably detained in town) Cecil Coventry drove up to our door and entered, followed by a young man whose appearance was not altogether unfamiliar to me.

"Allow me to present—" he began.

"Mr. Sinclair!" I cried, quite forgetting myself.

"Yes; I did not know you had met before," he said, in surprise, while I saw a puzzled look come into the other's face.

"Excuse me, I met—I saw Mr. Sinclair some years ago—no doubt he has forgotten me—at Atlanticville," I faltered.

"Indeed? Excuse me; it seems rude to say that I have forgotten you when you are kind enough to say you remember me," he said, with a peculiarly pleasant smile. "Do you know Atlanticville well? I passed some happy days there, just before I sailed for the Arctic seas."

He sighed as he spoke, and his face grew sad; then he turned to bow to Emma, to whom Cecil Coventry was presenting him. And that ceremony over, he sat down beside me, while Emma and Cecil talked together by the window.

A smile lighted up Sinclair's face as he watched them.

"Have you known Mr. Coventry long?" I asked.

"Since we were boys together at school," he replied. "I feel, Miss Trafford, in spite of my surprise at your recognizing me a few minutes ago, almost as if we were old acquaintances. Cecil has spoken so often of you to me. Your sister married his cousin the other day, did she not?"

"Yes. And he was best man, while Emma and Lisa—"

"Who? Lisa who?" he asked, hurriedly, looking at me anxiously.

"Lisa Lonsdale, a friend of ours," I faltered. "They—"

"Lisa Lonsdale!—and he never mentioned her!" he cried, excitedly. "But what am I thinking of? I never told him; it was my fault. Where is she, Miss Trafford?"

"Just now, she and Colonel Lonsdale are in Paris," I replied.

"And I have been expecting for months past to hear from them! Tell me, Miss Trafford, is—Miss Lonsdale engaged?"

"To be married? No: I believe—I know she is not," I replied.

"And she is well—recovered from the illness she was suffering from when I left the States?" he asked, anxiously.

"Hardly recovered; but still, much better. Oh, Mr. Sinclair, I am a poor one at pretending! I feel so thankful you have come home, for I believe that you will be able to do more toward restoring our dear Lisa to her former health than any one else!"

And then we plunged into an absorbing conversation.

Mr. Sinclair soon opened his heart to me, and told me all his hopes and fears, and his love for Lisa, and listened with the deepest interest to what I had to tell him about all that had passed since he left Atlanticville.

"That first letter, the only one I ever received from the colonel, told me of the murder, and her illness. Since then, not a word of her has reached me. You may imagine the state of miserable anxiety I have been in," he said, in conclusion.

"And in another week they will have returned to Penton, when all your trouble will be over, I trust," I rejoined. "But can you throw any light on the cause of Lisa's extraordinary depression?"

"The shock—nothing more—caused it; at least, so it seems to me," he replied, thoughtfully. "Have you ever talked over the murder with her, Miss Trafford?"

"Never; she can bear no allusion to it," I answered.

He remained silent, and Emma, Cecil and the tea entering simultaneously, our conversation was brought to a close.

But my head was so full of Lisa, that I never remarked, till I found myself alone that night in my bedroom, that Emma and Mr. Coventry had been absent in the garden for nearly an hour that afternoon, while Mr. Sinclair and I had had our talk together.

The Lonsdales returned rather unexpectedly two or three days sooner than I had anticipated, and it was from Mr. Sinclair I heard first of their whereabouts.

All flustered and breathless he rushed into the cottage one afternoon, as I sat alone in my accustomed seat by the window.

"She has come—they are here, Miss Trafford!" he cried. "I have seen her again!"

"Who—Lisa? This is sudden, indeed! How quickly you have walked to tell me so! I hope you will not bring on a return of your illness, Mr. Sinclair;" for it was ill-health that had obliged him to leave his ship and return home.

"No fear of that. I am only longing to see her—to speak to her, and learn my fate. She *did* love me once, Miss Trafford; I—you know that much."

"Yes, I am certain she did," I replied, growing quite excited; "and I cannot but believe—hide it as she will and may—she does so now."

"Oh! I trust you will force the acknowledgment of it from her!"

"Now sit down and rest while I make you some lemonade."

Next day early I took my way to Penton, leaving Emma engaged in inditing a long epistle to Eleanor; and as I entered the park the sounds of well-known voices fell on my ear—the voices of Lisa and Mr. Sinclair.

Was I to be the involuntary spectator of another love-scene between them?

"What has changed you, Lisa, my own love?" I heard him say, in imploring accents.

"Do you remember the last evening we were together—that night on the beach?"

"Yes," she interrupted, in a stifled voice; "that terrible night. Ah, how little I imagined that that would be the last happy one of my life!"

"Why should it be? Why, in Heaven's name, if you love me as you did then—and you have just denied that you are fickle, Lisa—why may we not pass many happy years together? The hope of having you for my wife, Lisa, has nerved me in the hour of danger and given me strength to go through what would have crushed many a man. In all my dangers and difficulties, darling, I have thought of you. You have been my guiding star; and now—now that I am with you once more, are you bent on sending me away forever?"

She murmured something in reply which I could not catch.

"Be my wife, darling—trust me—tell me all!" he went on.

"No, no," she broke in, passionately. "Leave me! Do not torture me! I cannot—I cannot!"

"Cannot you trust me, Lisa?" he said, reproachfully.

"Not in this matter," she replied.

"What! Do you doubt my honor? Have I so fallen in your estimation, then?" he replied, bitterly.

"No; do not misunderstand me. I do not doubt you. I honor, I—respect you, and in no way have I altered toward you; but my secret must never be told. It shall die with me. I cannot marry you!"

"Then your secret shall be your own, darling. I should be the last to try and force it from you. But why should it separate us? That is what I cannot comprehend."

"You are very good—very kind," she murmured, with a sob in her voice; "but it can never be."

"Then you have changed—you do not love me, Lisa?"

"Nay, I did not say that," she replied, quickly. "At least—"

"Ah! if you only tell me you love me, I shall not give up hope. I will find out your secret, Lisa, and show you it can make no dif-

ference in my love for you, and my earnest desire to make you mine."

I caught a glimpse of her face through the branches as he said these words. It had turned deadly pale.

"If you love me, you will never try to find out my secret! If you care for my happiness, my peace of mind, you will let the matter drop and leave me—forever!" she said, in a low, husky voice. "Say good-by now, and let us never meet again!"

"That I refuse to do! Nay, I must speak out, Lisa! I can see you are sacrificing yourself to some mistaken sense of duty, and I cannot go away and leave you, break my own heart, and maybe yours (for I believe you love me, darling), because you persist in hiding from every one something which maybe, if told, would be easily cleared. Have you no pity for me—for yourself—for your father, Lisa?"

As he said the last word, Lisa's manner changed, and a wild light that almost frightened me came into her large, dark eyes.

"I do not care for myself," she gasped; "but I have pity for you and for him; therefore I will neither tell my secret nor marry you."

She tottered backward as she spoke, and would have fallen had I not started and caught her in my arms.

"Tina, Tina," she sobbed, "tell him to go—it is useless! Take me away; hide me from him! Take me home, or my heart will break!"

I took her in my arms, and she wept bitterly on my shoulder. I signed to Mr. Sinclair to leave us.

He hesitated; then pressing her hand to his lips and murmuring a few words of farewell, he turned away, and Lisa and I walked slowly on to Penton.

"Come and see me to-morrow; I cannot talk any more now, my head is splitting," she said. "Oh, Tina, am I never to be happy?—how long is this misery to last?"

And then she turned away, and I heard her lock the door behind her as she entered her own room.

CHAPTER IX.

A DYING CONFESSION.

I PUZZLED myself not a little over what I had heard as I walked back to Sunnyside.

Nothing in Lisa's words threw the slightest light on what troubled me.

I felt sick at heart and terribly sorry for poor Mr. Sinclair, who had grown a great favorite with us all.

"It is seldom a girl gets a fairer chance of happiness in married life than Lisa would have with him," I thought, as I entered the hall. "Ah, here is a letter from Eleanor, dear child! What a thick packet! I wonder what news she has to tell us? But first I must see where Emma is; then I will settle down, and enjoy my letter thoroughly."

Emma was nowhere to be found; so throwing off my hat and shawl, and seating myself on the sofa, I began to peruse Eleanor's epistle; and after reading the first words, I was speedily so absorbed in its contents that I don't think the report of a cannon would have aroused me.

"Such an extraordinary thing has happened, Tina; I can hardly believe it. But Reginald says there is no doubt but that it is really true. Just fancy his coming across the Atlanticville murderer in the hospital here, and receiving his dying confession!"

"But I had better begin at the beginning, and tell you the whole story. There was a wreck here last week. A vessel struck on the rocks at the point in a gale, and out of the sixteen men on board, only four were found, clinging to the rigging, when the lifeboat reached her."

"Three were sailors, and the fourth a passenger, who was so badly hurt, that he was taken at once to the hospital; and the next day Reginald visited him. He was very dull and

taciturn, and spoke only a few words the first time; but Reginald was troubled with a certain likeness in him to some one—he could not say to whom—and tried hard to get him to give some account of himself. It was of no avail, however. The man kept his mouth rigidly closed, and would answer no questions.

"At first the doctor gave hopes of his recovery—the injury he had received was not considered mortal; but after the third day he began to grow worse instead of better, and soon the doctor saw he would never again rise from his bed.

"Doctor Brice says, when he felt it to be his duty to tell the man of the state he was in, that he shall never forget the look of horror and dread that passed over his face.

"Must I die?" he said. "Has it come to that, doctor? I am a poor, miserable wretch—I cannot pay you to save me; but if you have any pity left in you, you will not let me die. I cannot. You must save me!"

"My poor fellow," replied Doctor Brice, soothingly, "it is beyond human power to save you. If I could, I would do it; but I should be wrong to give you false hope. We must all die some day. Try and nerve yourself to meet the common fate of all."

"The man turned pale, and gasped for breath.

"Yes, all die," he replied; "but all have not the sins to answer for that I have. It is not death I fear; it is—" And he covered his face with his hands and shuddered. "I see her face always before me, with the moonlight shining on her yellow hair, and the tears in her blue eyes! Will it never go? Shall I always see it? Sometimes I fancy"—and he whispered the words in an awe-struck tone—"that she is here—close to me! I hear her voice calling me, and her shriek as she disappeared over the cliff!"

"Doctor Brice looked at the unfortunate man.

"It is a clergyman, not a doctor, you want," he said. "If you have done wrong, confess it, and make your peace before it is too late."

"A clergyman? One came to me, and I had half a mind to speak, but I could not then. Send for him, doctor, and I will try again," he answered, eagerly. And an hour later Reginald was beside him.

"He had a hard, hard struggle with the unfortunate man. He would not speak for a long time; he clung to the hope of recovery, though every hour that passed brought him nearer to death, and when the end came, fought desperately for life; and he confessed he had committed a crime, and was a sinner of the deepest dye, but not until the cold damps of dissolution gathered on his brow would he make a clean breast of it and confess how he had sinned.

"My name," he said, holding Reginald's hand in his dying grasp, "is Frank Milton. I started in life with every advantage the world could give me; but gambling and drinking destroyed me, and dragged me down until, at the age of twenty-five, I was a ruined man.

"My fortune spent, my prospects gone, and my mother brought to her grave through grief at my career, I had one relation left—a step-brother, my mother's eldest son, and all he could do for me, he did.

"But I only repaid his kindness with ingratitude, and at last only on condition that I would never again set foot in America would he consent to assist me, and allow me a small annuity in a foreign land.

"For several years I kept to my bargain. I married, and for a while my wife kept me from the gaming-tables, but soon the old love of play returned with its former strength, and all my nights and the best part of my days passed in the gaming-houses of the town in which I lived.

"Of course I lost, and misery and poverty were the result.

"My wife's health failed, her temper grew soured, our home was wretched, and she bitterly upbraided me with being the cause of her misery. The finger of scorn was pointed at me

on every side, and the keen pangs of poverty made themselves daily felt.

"Like a coward, as I was, I resolved to desert my wife and go back to America, see my brother once more and implore him to give me a fresh start. Minna's friends, I thought, would look after her. My brother did not know I was married, and I hoped that unincumbered in a new country I might at length have a chance of succeeding in life.

"I managed to steal away one night while Minna was visiting a relation, and in ten days I was again in the States and at Atlanticville, where my step-brother, Colonel Lonsdale, resided. What! (as Reginald started) you know him; but what does that matter? You can tell him all if you like.

"He was very good to me, as he always had been, and agreed to give me the start in life I asked for. My ticket to California was secured, and I bade him good-by on the second of July, resolving, if possible, to lead a better life, and return to Minna if I found I prospered.

"What malicious demon prompted me to it I know not, but late that night I wandered out of the town where I was staying in the direction of my brother's house on the cliff; and as I reached the pathway that led past it, I became sensible that some one was following me.

"I turned, and, to my anger and dismay, beheld my wife.

"Ah, villain!" she whispered, in a hoarse voice, "so you thought to leave me. But I have followed you, and I do not intend to let you go."

"And she caught hold of my arm.

"Wretch!" she cried, "you would desert me—leave me to starve. I who have been your faithful wife!"

"Listen to reason! Hear what I have to tell you!" I urged.

"Listen to falsehoods and deceptions!" she replied. "No, I am come to expose you. Tomorrow I will see your brother, the rich colonel who lives in yonder house, and—"

"I smiled when I thought that before the morrow's sun rose I should be miles away across the continent.

"She caught my smile, and paused with a look of baffled fury in her face.

"What new villainy have you in hand?" she asked, passionately. "I will not wait till tomorrow; I will go to him now. See, there is a light in yonder room. He is there!"

"We stood within the garden then, just at the edge of the cliff.

"I seized her by the arm. She attempted to free herself from my grasp, and struck me in the face. We struggled together.

"I heard the waves dashing on the rocks below.

"A terrible feeling of hatred and revenge filled my heart.

"I dragged her to the very edge of the precipice, and laughed when I saw the tears fill her eyes. Then, with all my strength concentrated into one effort, I threw her from me over the precipice—and fled!

"As I hurried frantically away, a cry—not the shriek she gave, but a cry from another voice—fell upon my ears, and lent wings to my flight.

"I caught the evening train and reached the city before midnight, and in a few hours had started on my journey rejoicing in my escape, and without one pang of remorse for the crime I had committed.

"But now—now!" And the miserable man looked imploringly into Reginald's face.

"It was a terrible time for my husband," continued Eleanor in her letter. "He did all he could for the poor, heavily-burdened soul; but the passage from earth to another world was a troubled one, and but little could be done to assuage the pains of dissolution, though the dread of death was partly overcome, and Reginald believed the man's repentance to be sincere.

"His likeness to Colonel Lonsdale was of course the likeness that struck him when he

first visited the poor creature in the hospital. He says he was just about the colonel's height and figure, and resembled him not a little in feature."

"What an extraordinary tale!" I thought, as I laid the letter down. "I see Eleanor says her husband is writing to Colonel Lonsdale. It will be a painful thing for him to hear, poor man!"

"How terrible for the family!" said Emma, when, on coming in, she perused the letter.

"We must tell no one—it must never be mentioned. Remember that, Emma!" I said.

"Of course not!" she answered. "But you will see Lisa will be a different creature in future."

I was going to ask her why, when Mr. Coventry entered, so I held my peace.

He had become a very constant visitor at Sunnyside; and understanding as I did every turn of Emma's countenance, I could see plainly enough how dear he was growing to her.

Sometimes my heart sunk as the possibility presented itself to me that, after all, Mr. Coventry's attentions to her might mean nothing, and that one day she might awake to find her dream of love and happiness—for, all unknown to herself, I felt certain she was indulging in such a dream—dissipated.

"She would never get over such a grief," I thought. "Many a girl would forget in time, but to Emma it would be a death-blow. Not that I think Mr. Coventry would willfully deceive her, but his position and ours, although our family may be as refined and good in every way as his, are so different. We are so poor, and he so rich and influential, that his family might object to his marrying a nobody like Emma. Oh, dear! I wish I had any one to consult in the matter. Mrs. Parsons is too much of a gossip, and I can hardly trouble Colonel Lonsdale with a fear that may be quite imaginary on my part."

And then I remembered that Mr. Coventry had told us he had no near relations, except an aunt—his mother's sister—a certain Mrs. Hamelford; and I was selfish enough to rejoice not a little at the fact. If he did care for Emma, surely his aunt's opinion of her would not weigh very heavily with him?

However, I very much disliked the idea of Mrs. Hamelford, whom I pictured to myself a high and mighty lady of fashion, who would look down on us from the height of her aristocratic position.

Mr. Coventry had told us he expected her to pay him a visit at the Hall shortly, and I confess the news disturbed me.

Emma, too, regarded her advent with dread.

"She has five children, three girls and two boys," said Emma; "but the girls are all married, Tina, except the youngest, and she's engaged."

"Oh! Mr. Coventry seems to have told you all about them?"

"Yes. He says he likes to talk to me about his relations, because I never seem bored as other people would; but it interests me to hear him, Tina," she replied.

"I dare say. When is Mrs. Hamelford to arrive?"

"Not for two or three weeks more. She is staying in Newport with her eldest daughter now; and oh, Tina, only think, when she does come he is going to give a ball in the big drawing-room of the Hall, and every one is to be invited!" she replied.

"Ourselves among the number, I suppose?" I said, with a smile. "Well, Emma, we must look up our dresses. As for me, it is years since I was at a ball. I have quite forgotten what they are like."

"You must wear your black velvet and pearls, Tina. You'll look splendid!" she said.

"Who do you think would look at me, when you and Lisa are by?" I said, with a laugh.

"I know who will!" she cried, saucily, and ran out of the room.

CHAPTER X.

A DAUGHTER'S INJUSTICE.

I STARTED next day for Penton with a beating heart.

I felt sure the news I had heard the evening before would affect Lisa greatly, and I had a sort of wild, unreasoning idea that it might in some way influence her to look more kindly on Mr. Sinclair's suit.

I asked for Colonel Lonsdale when I got to the house, and was told that he had gone out early that morning, and would not be in till lunch time; so I made my way up to the little room where Lisa generally sat in the forenoon.

As I crossed the hall my eyes fell on a letter lying on the marble slab, addressed to Colonel Lonsdale in Reginald's handwriting. It was unopened, having arrived, I suppose, after the colonel had started from the house.

"She can't have heard of it yet. However, there can be no objection to my telling her," I thought, as I walked up-stairs; but I wished, nevertheless, that Colonel Lonsdale had been in.

I knocked at the door of the little room, and Lisa's voice bade me enter. She looked dreadfully depressed, and I could see had been weeping bitterly. I doubted if she had closed her eyes during the night, so weary and tired did she appear.

I kissed her warmly and heartily, and she returned my embrace, bidding me sit down beside her on the sofa.

"I know why you have come, Tina," she said nervously, before I had time to say a word. "Don't think me unkind, Tina, but I must ask you not to talk to me of what happened yesterday. I cannot bear it!"

Her voice trembled pathetically as she spoke and I saw two big tears rise to her eyes.

"My dear Lisa," I replied, in a cheerful tone, "I don't mind making a little wager with you that you do not know what has brought me over here to-day."

"Why, you promised yesterday to come!" she returned in surprise.

"That is true; but I have come to talk to you on a different subject, dear. I heard some very strange news last night, Lisa."

A startled look came into her eyes.

"News!" she said uneasily; "news of whom—of what?"

"Of what neither you nor I ever expected," I replied gravely. "I had a long letter from Eleanor last evening; and—"

"Oh, from Eleanor!" she replied, as if greatly relieved. "You quite frightened me, Tina. I am getting more foolishly nervous, I'm afraid."

"That dreadful affair at Atlanticville was enough to give a shock to any one's nerves," I replied. "But you must be brave, Lisa, for it is of that—of the murder—I have come to speak to you."

"You have come to speak to me about the murder," she said in a low voice. "What can you know—what can you have heard about it? You have been at Atlanticville, but—"

"Yes; I was there, oddly enough, on the very night of the murder. My poor old uncle made his will that night, Lisa, and your father was one of the witnesses, and stayed with us till—"

She had grown whiter and whiter as I spoke.

"Yes; I know that he was out, and came in just as the clock struck—"

"Yes; just as the clock struck two he left my uncle's house," I interrupted.

She looked at me, oh, so strangely! There was such doubt and terror, mixed with a wild hope, in her eyes that I felt unnerved!

"Go on! What then? I tell you you are wrong about the time though," she muttered.

"I am sure I'm not. But what does it matter if I were? The whole mystery is explained, and the murderer—"

She gave a short, sharp cry of agony.

"Have they taken him?—is he arrested? Oh! for pity's sake, Tina, do not let—"

"Hush, hush, my dear!" I cried. "No; he is not arrested. The world will, may be, never

know of his guilt, but he has confessed it. At the eleventh hour his heart softened, and he confessed his crime to Reginald."

"To Reginald—Mr. Dacre?" she faltered. "How—how— Oh, Tina, I cannot understand it! Is he dead, then?" And she sunk trembling from head to foot, at my feet.

"Yes; he died three days ago," I replied.

She looked at me wildly.

"His name?" she said, hoarsely.

"His name?"—(and for a moment I hesitated, but the imploring agony in her eyes compelled me to speak)—"his name was Frank Milton!" She gave a great gasp.

"Where is my father?" she cried, starting up suddenly. "Does he know this? Let me go to him, Tina! No, you cannot stop me—I must see him at once!" she cried.

"He is out; he has not come back from his ride; he knows nothing of this!" I answered.

"Is it true? Can it really be true? Are you certain?" she continued. "Oh, Tina, how can I ever forgive myself."

"I don't see how you are to blame," I replied, quite bewildered.

"No; of course you don't. But I will tell you all, if I can. Frank Milton was my—father's—step brother—very like him. I believed him dead, and—and—when on that fearful night I witnessed that terrible scene, I thought—I believed— Oh, Tina! can you not see the fearful mistake I made?—the awful delusion I have been laboring under, and which has made me the miserable creature I have been ever since?"

"I looked at her for a moment in undisguised consternation, and then the full meaning of her words broke on my bewildered brain. I sunk back in my chair and burst into tears.

"Yes, hate me—despise me—as you must!" she said. "I see you understand at last what I mean! But, oh, if you knew the horrid suffering, the misery and the dread and doubt I have endured, you would pity, however much you might condemn me!"

"Condemn you, my poor child? I cannot tell you how I feel for you! I see how natural your mistake was. I feel how terribly you have suffered!" I cried, taking her in my arms and kissing her. "But now, cheer up, darling, for the sky above you is bright once more, and the clouds of trouble are dispersing."

"But I do condemn myself in many ways, Tina," she went on, after sobbing quietly in my arms for a few minutes. "I have often been cold and cruel to him when—when I ought to have felt nothing but pity, even—even had what I believed been true! And, after all, I was wrong, and it was the brother for whom he gave up so much, and to whom he was so good! Poor father! how can I ever tell him?" And she looked at me appealingly.

I was silent for some minutes.

"Lisa, he must never suspect it," I said at last, very gravely. "I don't want to be unkind, dear, but I must say to you that I believe the knowledge of it would break his heart. You must keep the secret to yourself, Lisa. It may be a heavy burden for you to bear, perhaps; but I am ready to share it with you alone. Why should we wound him by letting him know that for these many months past you have regarded him as—"

She laid her hand on my mouth.

"Don't—don't say it; I can't bear it. You are right; we will never let him know. Oh, how I will try to make up to him for all my past coldness! I shall never be happy until I have convinced him that I love him as I did when I was a little girl."

"I don't think you will find it very difficult to do that," I said, smiling. "He loves you so dearly, Lisa, you have only to show him your love in return and act in all things, great and small, as he would have you. And one thing more, Lisa. Is there not a little corner in your heart left for Mr. Sinclair? Will you not give him a little hope, dear?"

A bright blush rose to her face and then faded away.

"He is gone, I fear, perhaps forever, as I bade him. It is too late," she said.

"No, I think not, darling. Take heart, and I foresee we shall all be happy soon."

"Poor papa—poor papa," she went on, "what a grief it will be to him to hear of this terrible news! How good he is to every one, and how little good even his nearest and dearest have done him in return. Ah, here he is, I believe!" and she rushed to the window as Colonel Lonsdale rode up to the door.

"He has some one with him," she cried. "Oh, how tiresome! I long to go to him, Tina. Now I must wait a while."

"I dare say his visitor will not detain him long," I replied; "and when he sees Reginald's letter with 'Immediate' on it, he will open it at once and come to us."

My words proved true. In a few minutes Colonel Lonsdale's footstep was heard on the stairs, and he entered the room.

"Miss Trafford, you have heard of this terrible affair?" he began. "Ah, Lisa, my love, I see you have been told!"

"Papa—papa—poor papa!" she cried, throwing her arms around him and kissing him repeatedly; "it is terrible! And, oh, I feel for you so! Tina has told me all."

I saw a look of surprise and joy in his face as he received Lisa's embrace, so different to the cold kiss with which she generally saluted him.

"It is what I more than half suspected," he said, quietly; "but my lips were of course sealed, and you did not recognize him, Lisa, happily."

She shook her head and then buried her face in his shoulder.

"No, of course," he continued. "You had not seen him for years, and of course hardly remembered him. Well, he is dead now and we must say no more of him. May Heaven forgive him! I tried my best to keep him straight when a boy, and to get him out of his troubles when he was older; but I could not induce him to lead a respectable life. Little did I imagine, however, that he would have fallen so low as he did. Poor Frank! Poor fellow!"

Tears were in the colonel's eyes as he spoke, and his voice faltered.

"Oh, father, father, how good you are—how little I have appreciated you!" said Lisa. "I feel as if I had been as wicked and ungrateful to you as—as he was; but it shall never be again, father, never! I feel as if a great cloud had been lifted from my brow to-day, and a heavy weight from my heart, and all seems clear before me as it used to seem before that dreadful night."

He took her head between his hands and looked into her eyes with an expression I shall never forget.

Did he for an instant realize what had obscured the love that had formerly existed between them?

Perhaps; but he never said a word, only, kissing her tenderly, seated himself beside her on the sofa.

"By-the-way," he cried, standing up a few minutes later, "there is an old friend waiting for me in the study—Mr. Sinclair—and he wants to bid you good-by Lisa."

"What! has he decided to go, then?" I cried.

"So he says," replied the colonel, with a sigh. "I wish it could be otherwise; but perhaps he is right."

"I am very sorry. Will nothing alter his mind, do you think?" I said, anxiously.

"That is difficult to say," replied he. "Something might, perhaps. He expects to be sent off to the African coast among the slaves, on an expedition being gotten up. He has excellent interest, and may probably get the ship he wants."

I saw Lisa getting paler.

"Africa—just after the Arctic regions!" she faltered.

"Yes; rather a change, is it not? But soldiers and sailors don't think of such trifles as

climates, my love, and Sinclair's a thorough sailor. But we are keeping him waiting all this time. Miss Trafford, shall we go down?"

"Certainly. Come, Lisa, are you ready?" I said.

"Yes; but you go first with papa—I will follow," she replied. "I must just arrange my hair a little; I—I—"

Victor Sinclair looked up eagerly as we entered.

"Well, will she see me?—have you persuaded her?" he asked, with great anxiety.

"I did not think she required much persuasion, my dear fellow. Lisa did not express an unwillingness to see you, did she, Miss Trafford?"

"None whatever. I think Lisa was— Ah, here she is!"

Bashfully and with downcast eyes, Lisa entered. She had put on (I noticed it at once) the very dress in which I had seen her that evening on the beach, and she had arranged her hair in the fashion she then wore it.

She held out her hand shyly to Frank Sinclair.

"Are you really going to Africa?" she said.

"To Africa?" he replied, glancing at the colonel, and catching the twinkle in his eye, he went on: "I'm not bound to go there, Miss Lonsdale; it depends on you whether I go or stay."

She was silent, and I could see her bosom heaving.

"Well, Lisa, give him his answer. Put him out of his pain," said the colonel, cheerily; "it's best to know one's fate."

"But can I decide, Mr. Sinclair?" she said.

"It is in your hands, Lisa," returned the young man. "If you will be my wife, I stay; if not, I go wherever fortune may lead me."

"Stay, then!" murmured Lisa. "Remember fortune is a blind guide!"

The colonel and I strolled out into the garden, but as I saw his eyes twinkling with a mischievous glee, I thought of the tale of the slavers, and Victor's intention to go to the African coast.

I wonder if the colonel divined what had changed her.

CHAPTER XI.

WEDDING BELLS.

"TINA, Mrs. Hamelford has arrived!" cried Emma, bursting into my room one afternoon about nine weeks later; "and Mr. Coventry is down-stairs, and wants to see you. He wants us to come over to the Hall to-morrow to lunch, and spend the afternoon, and talk over the arrangements for the ball he is going to give."

I rose and went down-stairs at once, while Emma staid behind to dispose of some of the hothouse flowers with which her hands were full, and which I knew at once came from the Hall; and I soon arranged with Mr. Coventry that we were to be with him the next day at two o'clock.

I pictured Mrs. Hamelford a cold, haughty woman of the world, who would manage to make me feel ill at ease in her company. So when on entering the drawing-room at the Hall I was met by a small, plump, kindly-faced, middle-aged lady with silver-gray hair and a sweet smile, I was agreeably surprised.

She shook hands with me in a manner that at once put me at my ease; and after looking a moment into Emma's blue eyes, kissed her tenderly on either cheek in a way that made me feel I could like her, and assured me that if Cecil Coventry did love the child she would be the last person in the world to try to oppose their union.

"You must come over again very soon, Miss Trafford, and help me," she said, cheerily, "otherwise I know I shall come to grief with my invitations, and get myself into

all sorts of trouble. Celia used always to attend to those details. I think I must ask you to spare Emma to me for a day or two next week."

"That's an excellent idea of yours, aunt!" cried Cecil. "Was I not right?" he whispered, as he put me into the carriage. "Is she not an old darling?"

"Quite right," I answered, as we drove off; and I found Emma was of the same opinion.

Of course every one accepted their invitations and the ball bid fair to be a most brilliant entertainment.

Lisa Lonsdale's engagement was now pretty widely known, and strangers who had heard of her beauty were anxious to see her.

The Lonsdales were to call for us in their large carriage, and drive us over and back again; and when Emma was dressed, and stood waiting for them to arrive, I felt that whoever was at the ball she would not pass unnoticed.

Her lovely complexion and golden hair was shown off to perfection by the blush roses that nestled against her snowy neck; and her eyes were bluer than the turquoises around it; while the soft tulle of her white robe draped her slender, graceful form in classic folds. In her hands she held a bouquet of forget-me-nots and camellias, sent that day from the Hall, while I wore one, scarcely less beautiful, of azaleas, that came to me from Penton. The colonel had gathered and arranged them (Lisa said), and I must thank him and not her, for were they not beautiful?

I really believe we created "a sensation" as we entered the ball-room, escorted by Mr. Coventry, Victor Sinclair, and the colonel, and partner after partner was introduced to both Emma and Lisa, whose cards were speedily filled.

I noticed, however, that Mr. Coventry claimed Emma for the first dance. I had quite expected to share the common fate of chaperons, and to act the part of wallflower all the evening; but I found, to my surprise, I was mistaken.

I was not allowed to sit still; and after a waltz with Mr. Coventry and a quadrille with Colonel Lonsdale, I found I had not many vacant dances on my card.

Again and again did I see Emma pass on our host's arm, her eyes sparkling with happiness; and as I came up from supper with Colonel Lonsdale, I caught sight of the pair disappearing into the great conservatory together.

"Coventry is fond of the Hall," said Colonel Lonsdale, quietly. "You will not be separated by any great distance from your sister, Miss Trafford."

"Do you think—" I began.

"Of course I do. Ah, I saw you were anxious; but be sure Cecil Coventry is not a man to trifle with any girl's heart. It will be charming, Emma being so near you. It is scarcely four miles from here to Penton."

"No; and only three from Sunnyside!" I replied with a sigh.

He looked up at me quickly and anxiously.

"No; of course, you are nearer to the Hall at Sunnyside," he said, quietly looking down again. "We shall feel lonely when both our birds have flown, Miss Trafford."

I was about to say, "There is always the hospital for me to return to," but Lisa, looking brilliantly beautiful, came up on Victor Sinclair's arm.

"What a sensation Emma is making, Tina!" she cried. "Every one is raving about her! How lovely she is looking to-night!"

"I think you share the general admiration with her, my dear," I answered. "Ah, here she is! What, off again?" as the music struck up, and I saw Mr. Coventry resign Emma to another partner. "And you, too," I added, as Lisa prepared to accept the arm of a certain friend of our host's, and I was left alone. Only for a moment; in another, Cecil had taken a seat beside me.

"Thank Heaven!" he cried, fervently, "it's over, and—"

"What, are you so tired of the ball, then?" I laughed.

"The ball? What do you mean, Miss Trafford? I was not speaking of the ball, but of something—something I said to Emma just now. Do you know she has promised to be my wife? I can hardly believe it, upon my word! And I feel so thankful—so happy! Ah, there she is! Fancy a lovely girl like that caring for me!"

"I don't see anything so very astonishing in it," I replied.

"And you approve? She said she thought you would! Dear Miss Trafford, you have been like a mother to her, she tells me; and perhaps I ought to have spoken to you first, but we have your consent and approval, have we not?" And he looked quite anxiously at me.

"You have, indeed!" I replied, giving him my hand; and the tears would rush to my eyes as I said the words.

"You will miss her, I fear," he said; "but still she will be near you, and you must often be with us."

I nodded, but could not reply. My heart felt very full, and yet I rejoiced heartily, for Emma's sake, at the news I had heard.

"Well, our two birds are really going to fly," I said, sadly, to Colonel Lonsdale, who came up to me a few minutes afterward.

"What!—it is settled, is it?" he cried, joyfully. I rather wondered, at the moment, why it should cause him such pleasure even if it were.

"Yes; Mr. Coventry has just told me," I answered. "I wish I could speak of it as joyfully as you do, Colonel Lonsdale; but at present I can only look on the dark side of it."

"Forgive me; I'm selfish and stupid, I'm afraid," he replied. Then, seeing the tears in my eyes, "Let us take a turn through the conservatories," he added. "We are not likely to interrupt any lovers' confidences just now."

I wondered as we walked slowly along why he had called himself selfish; but I felt a little so myself when I found myself picturing the few opportunities I should have of meeting Colonel Lonsdale after the two weddings had taken place.

There would be no more morning visits to Lisa, or snug afternoon teas at Sunnyside, or rides and drives through the country.

I could only go to Penton when the colonel gave large, stiff dinner parties, and other ladies besides myself were present; and his visits to me would have to be confined to short calls at stated intervals, except when I might meet him at other people's houses. That would be all I should see of him in future.

I tried to appear cheerful, however, and Emma's joyful, loving smile as I met her at the end of our walk half reconciled me to my fate; and I managed to get through the rest of the evening without breaking down.

What days of bustle and business followed! Emma and Lisa made up their minds to be married on the same day, and Colonel Lonsdale insisted on giving the breakfast at Penton.

Eleanor wrote that she considered it a first-rate arrangement; but neither she nor Reginald could be present at the marriage (which was a grief to them), as an heir to the house of Dacre was expected. A trip to New York to buy Emma's trousseau was made. Lisa's had been already ordered, and we passed a delightful fortnight with Mrs. Hamelford in New York.

The wedding being fixed for the end of the following month, our hands were full, and the time flew by with lightning speed.

I had no leisure to think of what I should do and suffer when everything was over and I should be alone.

Again I stood before the glass in the room where I had arranged Eleanor's bridal toilette a year before, and fixed the wreath of orange blossoms with diamond stars on Emma's golden head.

Again I kissed the bride as she stepped into

her carriage, and then took my seat beside her, and was driven off to the village church.

Again, standing beside my sister at the altar, I gave her to the husband of her choice as I had given Eleanor, and Colonel Lonsdale beside me did the same for his child, Lisa. I felt like one in a dream as we walked into the vestry to sign the register, and it was only Mrs. Hamelford's cheery voice that aroused me.

"Well, my dear," she cried, laughing, "you took the place of parent in the ceremony splendidly. What a lovely bride she makes, does she not? It is hard to say which looks the better—Mrs. Cecil Coventry or Mrs. Victor Sinclair."

"Or which looks the happier," I replied.

A magnificent breakfast had been prepared at Penton, and a large number of guests had been invited. It was two o'clock before the brides rose to put on their traveling costumes. My heart sunk like lead when I realized that the hour for Emma and me to part had really come; but for her sake I tried to keep up and stifle my feelings. I did not wish her to see what a loss to me her gain was.

She clung to me and kissed me over and over again at the last moment; but tide and trains wait for no one—not even for brides and bridegrooms as I playfully warned her; and after a last embrace, I put her into the carriage, and she was gone. Colonel Lonsdale looked at me sympathetically as I bade him good-by.

"We shall both miss our bonnie birdies, I fear, Miss Trafford," he said. "Penton is a huge place to live alone in."

And he looked round rather dismally.

"Yes, far too huge," said Mrs. Hamelford, archly, which he answered with a smile. "Stop at Sunnyside, James. A charming man, isn't he?" she said, sinking back in her seat. "A thousand pities he should be unmarried. How capitally everything went off! I never saw a wedding better managed."

CHAPTER XII.

AN OLD MAID'S ROMANCE.

AUTUMN passed away rather slowly, and after a stormy October and dreary November, winter set in in right earnest, and the ground was white with snow around Sunnyside. We had had constant letters from the newly-married pair during this time. They were in Italy, and were to winter at Rome, so there was no chance of their being home again or our seeing them till spring was well set in.

I sighed as I thought of the many long winter evenings I should have to spend alone. I had hoped Eleanor would have passed some weeks with me; but her baby was delicate, and she feared the long journey for it, and I could not make up my mind to leave Sunnyside and go up to her for January, as she begged me.

I had seen but little of Colonel Lonsdale of late. Two or three times, however, he had ridden over to tea, and on several occasions had brought me letters from Lisa to read; and then we had a delightful time comparing the girls' accounts of their travels in Spain and Italy, and talking of what we would do when they came back.

"It will never be the same, though," I said, one afternoon, as we sat by the fire, I with Emma's last epistle in my hand. "When Emma returns she will live at the Hall, Lisa in New York, and except when they can come and pay a visit to their old homes we shall see nothing of them."

His kind, handsome face looked sad for a moment; then he sat down beside me with a quiet smile.

"Do you know, Miss Trafford," he said, "I don't believe either you or I are very happy? We are both suffering from loneliness, and—and I see so little of you now, for in losing Lisa I seem almost to have lost you also."

"Yes," I answered; "it is very different

from the old days when we used all to be so happy together. However, it is just what I knew would and must be." And I sighed as I folded up Emma's letter and put it back into the envelope.

"Lisa wants me to come over to them next month," he said, thoughtfully, as if he hardly heard my last words.

"Yes," I replied, dismally enough. "Emma says something of the same kind to me; but, of course, it can't be. I shouldn't like to leave while Eleanor's child is ill."

"No; I suppose not; then I shall not go either," he replied, decidedly. "I could not bear to think of you left quite alone here."

"How good you are!" I replied, gratefully, and with a tone of relief in my voice, for the idea of being the only one of the old happy party left at home, had nearly upset me.

"Am I good—why?" he asked.

"Because—because you are always thinking of me and what is best for me," I answered.

"Ah, if you would only let me think more—do more!" he began, and then stopped short. My heart beat fast, but I made no reply.

"Would it really grieve you if I were to go—to leave Penton?" he asked in a moment or two.

"Leave Penton! What do you mean?" I gasped, looking up into his face in astonishment. He looked curiously moved.

"Yes, if I left it altogether! It is very lonely now, Tina."

"I—I should—I don't know what I should do!" I cried, not noticing that he had called me by my name. "I—I should go back to the hospital at once; I could not live here without—"

And then I stopped suddenly, with a sense of utter confusion.

"But you will not go," I added, anxiously bending over my letters to hide my crimson face. "What has made you think of such a thing?"

"Being so near you, and seeing you so seldom, I cannot stand it, Tina; and I came to tell you to-day that unless you come to Penton for good, I must leave the place."

He looked at me very gravely as he spoke.

"But how? I don't understand!" I faltered.

"Don't you? Then let me explain," he said. "Our birds have flown, and we feel lonely without them—each in our respective nest. Don't you think we should be happier together, dear? Be my wife, Tina; and if you can love me as I love you, we shall be happy indeed!" For a moment I could not reply.

"Well, is it to be or not?" he said, at last, taking my hand. "Speak, Tina, for the suspense is hard to bear."

"But can you—do you really wish it?" I cried. "Remember, I am thirty-three, and—and quite an old maid!"

"And I am forty-six; quite a middle aged man!" he answered, with a happy laugh. "So you see we are well matched, Tina. But you haven't answered me yet."

"Well, if you insist—yes!" I faltered. "But oh, what will the girls say?"

"Imitation is the truest flattery," he replied. "Oh, Tina, my darling, you have made me very, very happy at last!"

"I am so delighted it has turned out just as I hoped and trusted it would when I was at the Hall," said Mrs. Hamelford, a month later, when I went to stay a fortnight with her in town. "I felt there was but one thing for you and Colonel Lonsdale to do. After all he has suffered, my dear, he will want a wife to be good to him, and you are just the very woman for him. Now, don't say you are too old. You don't look eight-and-twenty, and are as handsome in your own way as either Lisa or Emma."

I ran away, laughing; but, oddly enough, my colonel (as every one called him) had said the same thing to me once or twice before, but he, I felt, was no judge, for is not love proverbially blind?

We were married from Mrs. Hamelford's

house in Madison Square, a few weeks later—a quiet wedding enough, for there was no one in town of her acquaintance, and our own friends were all in the country. Of course Eleanor was there, and Reginald married us, and then we set out on our wedding-tour, which was to take us as far as Rome, where we were to meet our newly-married couples.

I thought Emma would have never done kissing me and crying over me when, six weeks later, we drove up to the Palazzo di Venezia, where she lived. Her joy was almost too great for words.

"She's been crazy ever since she heard of it, Tina!" said Cecil, laughing; "there's been no holding of her; she's fast becoming perfectly unmanageable."

Ours was a happy circle in Rome, where we staid till the winter had quite passed away, when, bidding the Eternal City a sorrowful farewell, we passed a few months in travel, and finally took passage for home once more.

"Poor Sunnyside; how empty it looks!" I said, as I drove by it on our way home.

But it was not long so. The Sinclairs took it, and made a present of it to Mrs. Parsons for her life; and the good lady and her nieces soon made the little place as bright and comfortable as ever. And the old lady insisted, four or five years later, when Emma's son and heir was beginning his education, on superintending his first efforts, and was engaged to do the same for our little ones when they shall have arrived at a proper age.

"She only wishes," she says, "that Lisa's boy will be near enough to her to be under her charge."

Every year, at Christmas-time, we have a great gathering at Penton, and the old house rings with happy voices and the echoes of pattering feet. Well, I little thought of such a termination to my career when I left the hospital to take upon me the cares of a household. But I need not say what a happy termination it is.

THE END.

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